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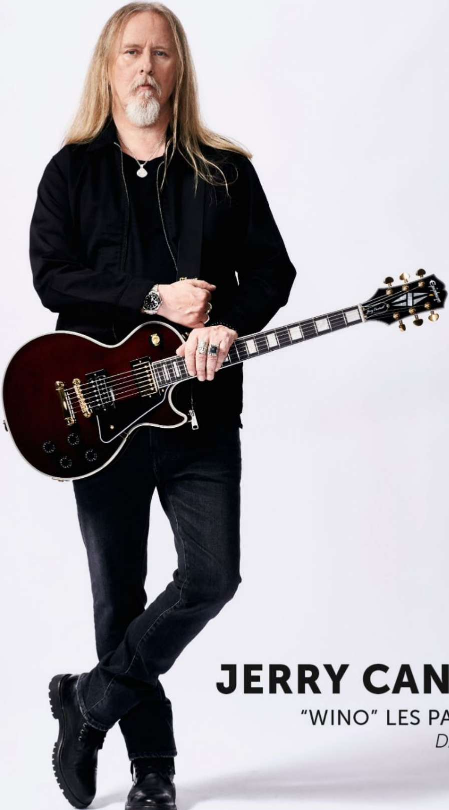

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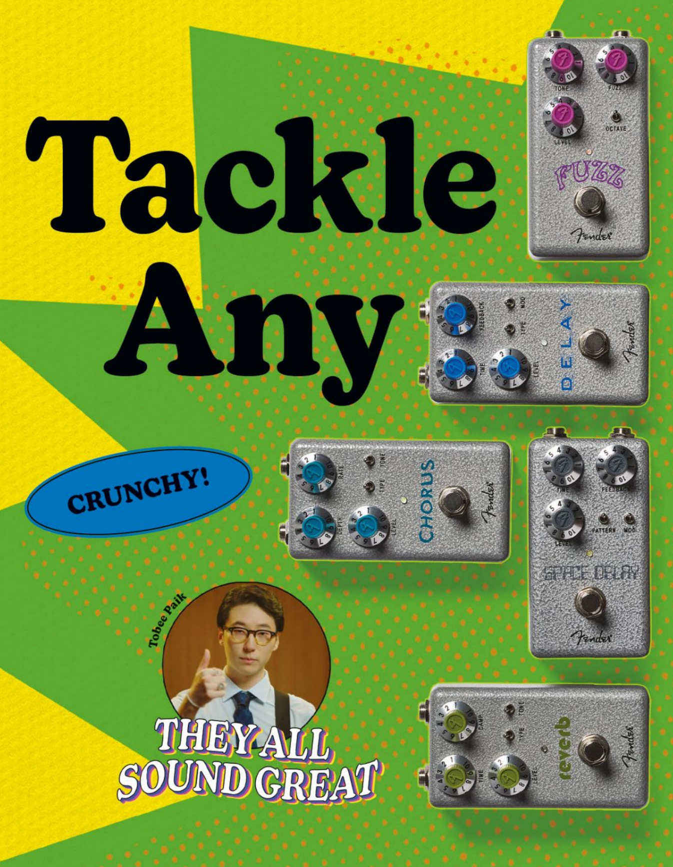
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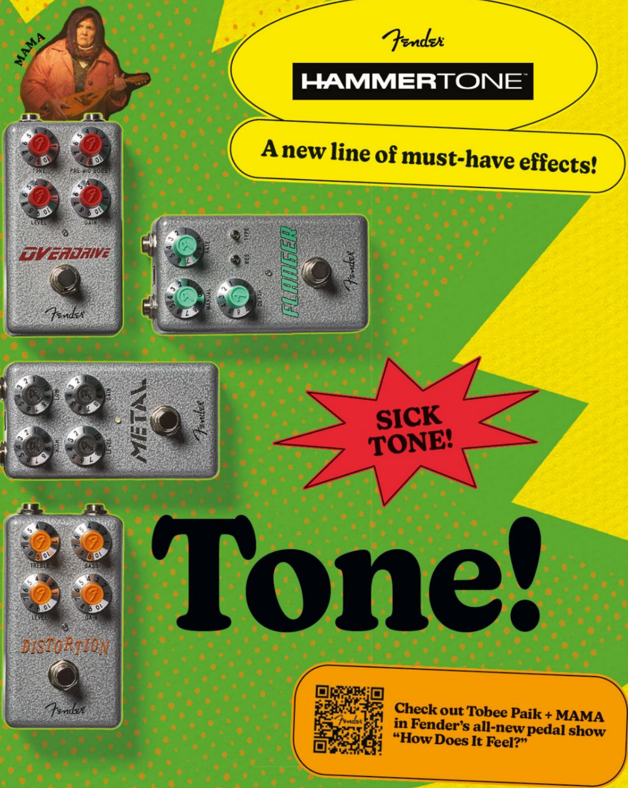
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FRIEND TO FRIEND

SOME ISSUES OF *Guitar Player* have a way of growing out of previous efforts. Take the one you're currently looking at.

In October 2021, as we were preparing our Holiday Reader's Poll issue about the Greatest Guitar Solos of All Time, we got the idea to ask some of our guitar heroes to tell us what players and solos were among their favorites. We were particularly taken by the responses from Dream Theater's John Petrucci, who cited Steve Morse's highly technical breakneck solo in the Dixie Dregs song "The Bash" as the one most influential to his playing and career. "More than any other player, Steve Morse changed my whole way of thinking on the guitar from the moment I heard him play," John wrote. "My first reaction after hearing Steve's solo on this song was, 'How does anybody play guitar like that?'… He quickly became my favorite guitar player. He changed how I thought about playing guitar, how I thought about my technique, and he inspired me to practice for hours on end."

While we knew the two men were friends, we didn't know Steve had been so influential to John, a guitarist who has followed in his hero's footsteps and assumed the mantle of shred giant in modern prog-rock. After reading John's praise for Steve, we knew we had to get the two guitarists together to discuss their individual journeys and share their advice with our readers. Earlier this year, contributing writer Joe Bosso sat down with John and Steve for a video chat, the contents of which you can read in this month's cover story.

But we were also dead set on getting the two men in the same room, COVID restrictions permitting. Earlier this year, when we learned that Dream Theater's tour for their latest album, *A View from the Top of the World*, would be passing near Steve's home, we asked if it would be possible to bring the guys together for a hang and photo shoot. They graciously agreed, taking time out from their busy schedules to meet for a few hours and sit for the pictures that appear in this issue.

I'm indebted to both John and Steve for their time and input, and to Kevin Chiaramonte of Paul Freundlich Associates for his assistance making it happen. Bear in mind, none of them did it to promote an album or tour. Both John and Steve participated for the joy of sharing their stories with us, and certainly for the great pleasure of sitting in each other's company for a while. After more than two years of experiencing life at a distance under COVID, stories like this are a reminder of the simple but deeply satisfying pleasure of looking another person in the eye — sometimes even in the same room — and having a chat. I hope you enjoy it.

Christopher Scapelliti

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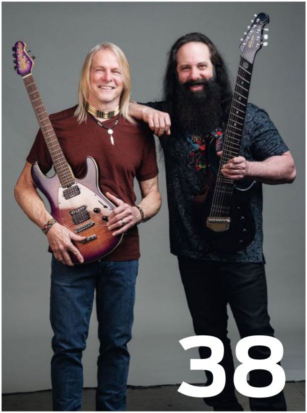

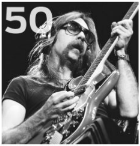

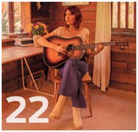

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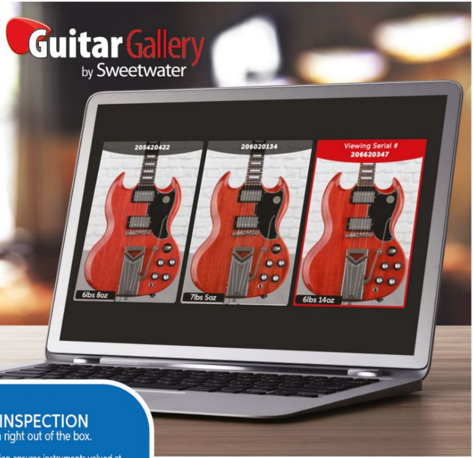

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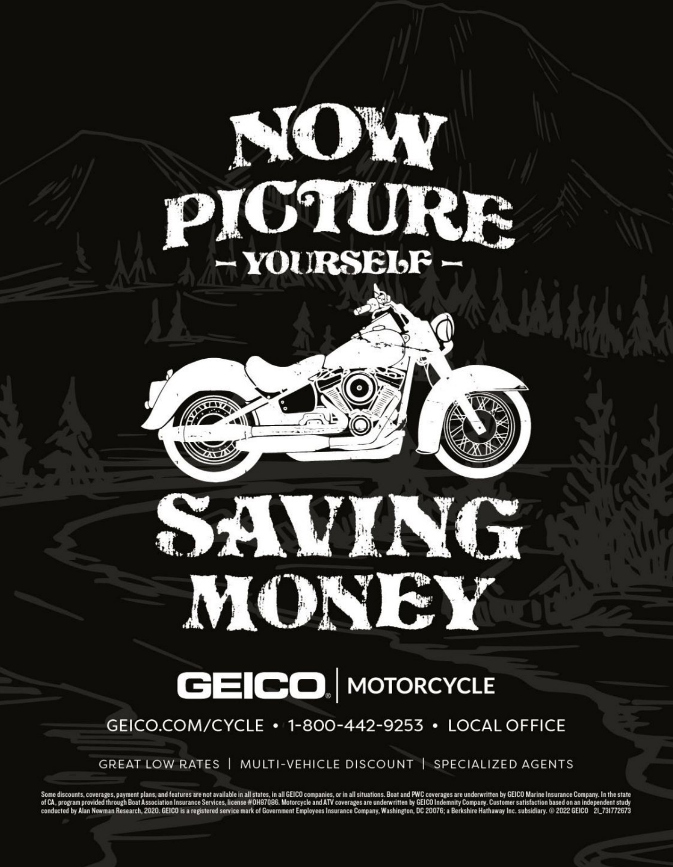

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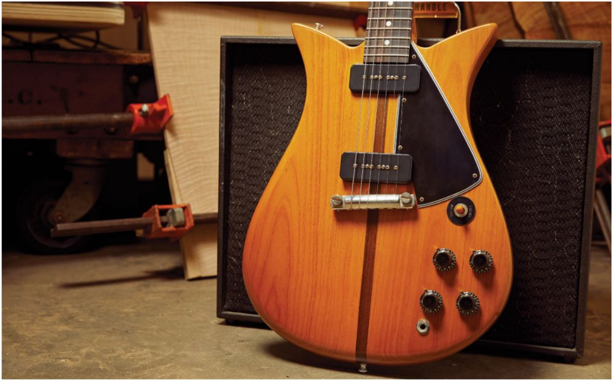


TED'S EXCELLENT INVENTION

After 65 years in the archives, a lost Ted McCarty design comes to life as the Gibson Theodore.

BY DAVE HUNTER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GIBSON GUITARS

AFTER JOINING THE solid-body revolution with the Les Paul in 1952, Gibson ramped up with impressive speed to meet the forward-looking sounds and styles of the rock and roll era. Just five years on from that introduction, the Kalamazoo-based company was designing and prototyping some of the most revolutionary electric guitars to hit the market, and company president Ted McCarty was very much at the helm of the effort.

McCarty was hired as Gibson's CEO in 1948, promoted to vice president in 1949 and, in 1950, advanced to the role of president, a position he held until his departure in 1966. Throughout his tenure, however, McCarty functioned as far more than an administrative executive. He'd earned an engineering degree from the University of Cincinnati and was never afraid to step out of the boardroom and into the R&D department, where he either contributed directly to major designs or displayed the foresight to shepherd them from development to prototyping to production. The innovative ES-175 was presented to the world shortly after his arrival, and his design prowess and/or managerial imprimatur was behind the Les Paul, ES-335, Explorer, Flying V, SG, Firebird and other legendary guitars, as well as the PAF humbucker pickup.

Named in McCarty's honor, the Theodore presented here developed from a sketch the former Gibson president made on March 18, 1957, and which was subsequently archived and forgotten. The original drawing fell out of a portfolio of lap-steel designs from 1946, which Gibson's head of product development, Mat Koehler, was examining while exploring the archives. The design is fascinating not only for its trenchant mystique but also because it provides a brilliantly insightful window into some of the avenues Gibson followed around that time, as evidenced by the various guitar models that it put into production.

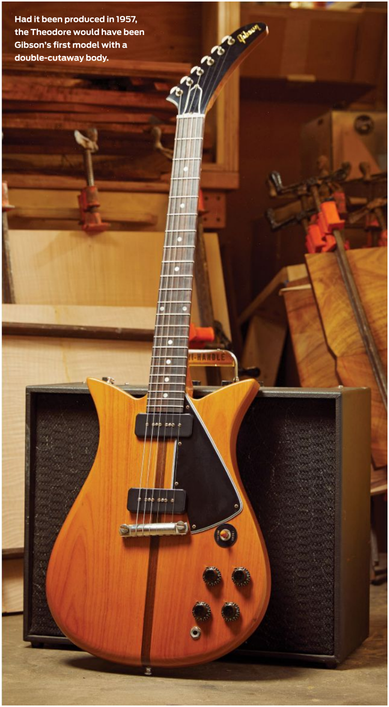
> "A SKETCH IS JUST THE STARTING POINT. WE HAD TO LOOK AT THE PRECEDENT THAT EXISTED BEFORE AND AFTER THE DESIGN"

Based on records of designs that were in progress, as well as dates on patent applications McCarty filed, we know that the drawing on which the Theodore was based was made just as Gibson was in development for the Modernist Series guitars. They include the Explorer and Flying V, which went into production in 1958, and the Futura and Moderne, which — like the Theodore — were not produced until some decades later, in pseudo-reissue form. In fact, the patent application for the design that would become the Explorer (which evolved from the prototype for the Futura) was dated June 20, 1957, and shows a split-V, three-per-side headstock. The Explorer went into production shortly afterward and hit the scene with the now-iconic droopy, six-to-a-side scimitar headstock, a feature foreshadowed in the March '57 drawing for the guitar on which the Theodore is based.

As you can imagine, creating a guitar like the Theodore from a mere two-dimensional sketch has its challenges, as Koehler tells *Guitar Player*. "I imagine it was similar to what Gibson had to do interpreting Ray Dietrich's Firebird ideas from the design portfolio he submitted to Gibson in 1962," Koehler says. "A sketch is just the starting point to get to a feasible instrument design. So yes, we had to look at the precedent that existed before and after the design, specifically the Les Paul Special double-cut, which debuted the following year. The sketch had a lot of features in common with that, so it was a good reference. The main changes were relocating the selector switch to a more player-friendly location and using a pickguard that lays flat instead of an archtop-style, which Gibson would not have used on a flat-topped model."

With two outward-curving horns on what would have been the first double-cutaway body in the lineup, the Theodore is made from a 1 ½ inch–thick two-piece alder body with a walnut center strip. Our example is finished in an Antique Natural that lets the wood show through, but there are options for Cherry and Ebony finishes, each of which also reveals the walnut center stripe. The glued-in neck is made from solid mahogany in the tradition of most Gibsons of the day, and it is quite a chunk, with a rounded, almost clubby profile reminiscent of some of the biggest chubsters the company ever produced. It's a feel I happen to like a lot, although it's something to consider for players who don't want to grapple with that much timber. It's topped with an unbound rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot inlays.

Like a 65-year-old rocket from the crypt, the guitar before us is a fascinating rendering of a design from Gibson's most productive era, and it's a nifty instrument in and of itself. The Modernist Series represented the upscale

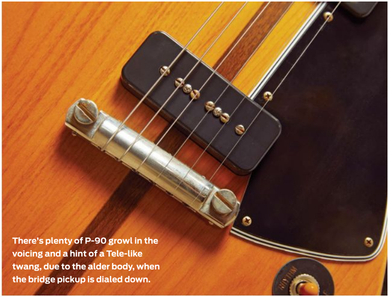

Had it been produced in 1957, the Theodore would have been Gibson's first model with a double-cutaway body.

range of space-aged designs from Gibson at the end of the 1950s, and featured humbucking pickups, solid Korina (white limba) bodies and gold hardware. Likely, the simpler, alder-bodied, P-90–equipped Theodore presented a way forward for what had started as the Les Paul Special but was intended to tie it in more with the Modernist guitars to come. In 1958, the Les Paul Junior would receive a double cutaway, and the Special would follow shortly after, but these retained the same basic overall lines as the existing single-cutaway models rather than follow the route of the Theodore's modernist rewrite of the recipe.

Given the oddity of this guitar among others in what would have been the Gibson catalog circa 1957, it's kind of amazing that it works. Koehler concurs, and offers some further thoughts on the subject. "My theory is that it was definitely a great idea," he says, "but it got stalled in the next phase of development due to the extreme round-over radius and the way it has to flatten out going up to the cutaways. I don't believe Gibson had a way to do this then, and even today with modern CNCs it was a challenge.

"But if Ted was thinking about the next version of the Les Paul Special, another possibility is that they went with a design that was more similar to the existing model and fit into the same case. It's also possible that more designs were pitched from the team and they simply went in a different direction."

Despite its rather outré shape, the Theodore sits well in the lap, inspiring a comfortable and natural playing position. It has a very detailed and lively response when played unplugged, bringing the interesting twist of alder's notable sonic characteristics — clarity, accuracy, immediacy and good balance — to a guitar that is otherwise built to a Gibson template. This translates immediately to a somewhat alternative experience that's still very LP Special–like when you amplify the guitar. And yet, given its design and body woods, the Theodore expresses something all its own. There's plenty of P-90 growl in an overall voicing that somewhat favors the upper midrange, while the guitar lends a little more solidity and bounce to lower-fret riffs on the wound strings. With the bridge pickup's grit dialed down slightly at the guitar's volume control, it hints at a somewhat Tele-like twang due to the alder body, while enfolding a girth and roundness from the 24 ¾–inch Gibson scale length. This sonic template plays through in all positions: There's plenty of roar and aggression for rock when you need it, but it delivers impressive clarity and articulation when you dial it back, producing a clear, chiming tone that's girthy and full. Rather than standing in for a great double-cutaway, late-'50s Les Paul Special, the Theodore brings something new to the table, with a voice and feel that some players might even prefer, depending on their stylistic needs.



There's plenty of P-90 growl in the voicing and a hint of a Tele-like twang, due to the alder body, when the bridge pickup is dialed down.

Unveiled precisely 65 years from the March 18, 1957 date on McCarty's sketch, the Theodore is being produced in a limited run of 318 guitars in honor of that date. Collectible extras inside the brown rectangular hardshell case with pink lining include a print of McCarty's original drawing, a 1957-style catalog page print and a Deluxe Certificate of Authenticity booklet. And, of course, the entire thing behooves us to ask whether there might be some other long-lost wonders lurking in the Gibson archives. "None as complete as this one," Koehler replies, "but yes, there are many more concepts for headstock and body shapes. Some recognizable, some very odd."

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PRICE $4,999

Joey (right) and Dave Landreth. Joey is holding his Sorokin LP Wraptail Goldtop.

SUBTLE GUITAR STAR

On his band's new record, Joey Landreth shows impressive six-string chops — and without long solos.

BY MICHAEL ROSS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA E. PARTAIN

A SMALL COTERIE of guitarists like Vince Gill, John Mayer, George Benson and Bonnie Raitt hit the show-biz trifecta: instrumental wizardry, vocal virtuosity and, it must be said, good looks. Add advanced songwriting skills and that list gets even smaller. Canadian Joey Landreth is among the few who possess all four attributes. He crafts harmonically interesting songs with great pop hooks, sings them like a soulful angel, and couches them in guitar textures and slide solos that have made him a poster boy for the six-string worship set. And yes, he is a handsome devil.

Landreth's command of harmony originates with his father, a singer-songwriter and bass player for hire who started his son on guitar. "He was into heavily harmonic music," Landreth says. "I was learning VI-II-V-I turnaround variations before 'Sweet Home Alabama.'" Joey and his bass-playing brother, Dave, cut their teeth in their father's band and as sidemen for other artists.

Once on their own, the aptly named Bros. Landreth burst on the Americana scene in 2015 with an amazingly assured album, *Let It Lie*. By 2019, Dave had burned out on touring but Joey kept going, releasing two well-received solo records in rapid succession. Later that year the brothers reunited to record the stunning but ill-fated *'87*. Although that album was released, touring and promotion were sidelined by COVID.

Whether recording solo or in the band, Landreth is a master of the mid-tempo, Memphis groove–based song. One such tune, "Made Up Mind," from the brothers' first record, was just covered by the aforementioned slide wielder Bonnie Raitt.

The latest Bros. Landreth record, *Come Morning* (Birthday Cake Records), is full of surprising sounds and chord changes, as well as a few gorgeous slide solos directly descended from Ry Cooder, Lowell George and Derek Trucks, but they have a sound all their own, thanks to the guitarist's penchant for low tunings.

Landreth spoke with *Guitar Player* about those sounds, solos, tunings and more.

Did you develop your career in Canada as a solo artist, session player or both? And when did you get into playing your guitar in a low tuning?

Around 2014, I met "Champagne" James Robertson at a festival in northern Saskatchewan. The backline at the show was terrible, so I offered to let him use my Fender

"I DO MY BEST IMPRESSION, BUT IF A REAL STEEL PLAYER HEARD IT, THEY'D SAY, 'GET OFF MY LAWN!'"

Deluxe. He said, "I appreciate it, but I play slide in open C and wouldn't want to blow up your amp." I said, "I would rather you played it and blew it up than didn't play." We hung out backstage and passed guitars back and forth. A few weeks later, I called and asked if he would mind if I borrowed his tuning. He said, "Go for it. I'm not the first guy to use it."

Are your acoustics tuned down as well?

I have a Collings that is my main acoustic. It lives in open D. I've tried to make it go down to open C, and it sounds good, but it sounds better in open D or even D flat.

Tell me how *Come Morning* came together.

We weren't happy with the basic tracks for the record, but by the time we decided to recut some of the tunes, the pandemic had flared up, so we were working in small bubbles — just my brother, me and our producer. We couldn't get a drummer in the room, so we put calls out to our drum heroes. The first to respond was Aaron Sterling [*John Mayer's drummer since 2011*]. It was a departure for us, because we usually make records with everybody in a room.

And yet the record sounds more intimate than your previous albums.

The studio I work in has an isolation booth that's lined with cedar. It doesn't sound huge, but it sounds beautiful. I wanted to use a lot of the room sound instead of big washy plate or spring reverbs. I hoped if people listened on headphones, they would feel like they were in that booth. The guitar tone on "Corduroy," for example, is pretty big considering how small the room is. I'm very honored you heard that because it's a point of pride for me.

On the tune "Stay," it sounds like there is a chorused electric.

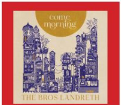
Actually, that is a subtle Prophet keyboard with chorus. Live though, I use a Boss VB-2 vibrato — the Mike Landau vibrato pedal. I almost bought a vintage one, but I talked myself out of spending 800 bucks and got one of the Waza reissues. I get chorus sounds by using a mixer to blend in the clean tone.

What are you using for the high electric arpeggios on "Stay"?

That's a Josh Williams Mockingbird, which is a 335-style hollow-body with Firebird pickups. I was on a session in a studio that had a Tele with a set of Firebird pickups that really killed, so when Josh asked what pickups I wanted, I said Firebird pickups. That guitar records so well, especially rhythm tracks. That sound is me doubling the harmony up an octave.

The slide sounds a bit like a steel guitar.

That was a volume pedal for swells, and a Fairfield Circuitry Shallow Water, which is a randomized chorus pedal with a low-pass filter envelope that adds a subtle warble to the front of the note. The guitar is a Mulecaster by Matt Eich from Saginaw, Michigan; it's a totally hollow stainless-steel Tele-style thing with a Bigsby Palm G bender and a B bender. I do my best impression, but if a real steel player heard it, they'd say, "Get off my lawn!"



RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Come Morning
"After the Rain," "Corduroy," "Stay," "Shame," "Drive All Night"

Is that a dobro on "Shame"?

Yeah. That's another Mule. Matt also makes steel-bodied resonators that are reminiscent of the old Nationals but built to modern standards. I lean on that resonator anytime I want that sound. I've got a couple of old ones, but they get neglected these days. That one lives in C tuning, although sometimes I will knock it down to B because it can take it and has pretty heavy strings.

Joey onstage with Ariel Posen in Nashville in 2014

ERIKA GOLDRING/GETTY IMAGES FOR AMERICANA MUSIC

On "Corduroy," there are licks and fills on both acoustic and electric guitars. Do you do a whole pass of acoustic playing fills in certain spots, but consciously leave space for the electric? Or do you fill all the way through with an acoustic and an electric and then decide which you want to use where?

A lot of those parts are from my demo, where I was conscious of not filling up all the space, knowing we would want to put some other stuff in. I tried to stay out of my own way. I wound up trying to play off the other parts as they were layered up. There's a Strat on one side and that Josh Williams 335 on the other. They play well together, for the most part.

How do you get that nasty slide tone on "Corduroy"?

There's the slide part in the center, a direct guitar, and a wah-wah guitar filling that out. I'm a huge Little Feat fan. [*Landreth released* All That You Dream, *an EP of Little Feat and Lowell George tunes, last year.*] Lowell George broke a lot of traditional guitar rules by plugging directly into a desk and getting these ugly guitar sounds that work in a mix. The main slide guitar is my Sorokin [*LP Wraptail*] Goldtop, which is my number one electric, plugged into a prototype for a signature Two Rock amp I'm working on.

Since you have a fan base of people who want to hear lots of guitar, can you conceive of doing a guitar record?

Absolutely, we've been talking about doing an instrumental record. On this record, I kept looking for moments for that guitar thing to happen and didn't see them. There's a dedicated guitar moment in "After the Rain," and one in the outro of "Corduroy," but in the bodies of the tunes there are no extended moments. There will probably be too many of those in the live show. In the last couple of months, I've found myself jonesing to play out a little more, so there's definitely going to be a vehicle for that, whether it's on the next Bros. record or on this instrumental thing we've been threatening to make. ◼

IN HER NATURE

On Crooked Tree, Molly Tuttle bends the rules of bluegrass tradition. "It's fun," she says, "to stretch the limits."

BY JONATHAN HORSLEY

BLUEGRASS BELONGS TO a long tradition, but having the weight of history on its shoulders does not preclude it from existing as a radical art form. This musical style — light on its feet, effervescent, joyous, and occasionally elegiac and melancholy — is woven from many cultures and voices that bring something to the party, and do so with a sound that welcomes all.

That, too, is true of the players and their abilities. There's a virtuosic element to the bluegrass rank-and-file, among whom we'll find latter-day phenoms in the likes of Billy Strings and Molly Tuttle — players whose technical prowess brings lightning into a largely acoustic space. But if you know three chords and can count to four, chances are you can play along too. And Tuttle says you would be made to feel right at home.

Her new album, *Crooked Tree* (Nonesuch), is a thoroughly modern bluegrass record, which is to say it mines the history of the art form for its sonic vocabulary and contextualizes it in the 21st century. It is explicitly bluegrass by design, but that happened only after the song ideas started piling up and Tuttle reached the point where it felt right to make an all-bluegrass record.

Speaking via Zoom before a show at Brownfield, Maine's Stone Mountain Arts Center, she explains how the genre's stylistic horizons yield plenty of free space for its contemporary practitioners to run into.

"I like bluegrass for the reasons that you mentioned," she says. "It is such a combination of different cultures and different influences. I think it is kind of radical in that it is a music that anyone can have access to. These are songs of the people, told by people who are just telling their own life stories a lot of the time. People try to put rules around it, and I don't think that's necessary. Once you learn the basic technique of playing bluegrass banjo or bluegrass guitar, it is going to sound bluegrass, and it's fun to stretch the limits of that."

Tuttle's approach involves applying her preternaturally gifted flatpicking technique to bluegrass patterns, orthodox or otherwise, and then telling a story. *Crooked Tree* stands proud on the wide open plains of bluegrass instrumentalism by virtue of its storytelling verve. There's the autobiographical "Grass Valley" that speaks of attending bluegrass festivals with her father, Jack, and she brings him onboard for a vocal. She also espouses big-tent themes of American unity in "Big

> **"IF YOU KNOW THREE CHORDS YOU CAN STRUM ALONG. YOU CAN ADD WHATEVER YOU WANT AND MAKE IT YOUR OWN"**

Backyard" that play out like Tuttle's take on "This Land Is Your Land." "It's just trying to give people a sense of, this country is very divided but it belongs to all of us," she explains. "I don't believe in trying to keep people out of America or building big walls over half the country."

Then there is "Dooley's Farm," which brings the aforementioned Billy Strings onboard for a 21st century reworking of the Dillards' famous standard. But Tuttle's Dooley is less known for his 40-gallon still than for the potent marijuana he grows on his land.

"I feel like a lot of people who play bluegrass are instrumentalists," she says. "Most of them don't write songs. A lot of them don't even sing, and a lot of them don't even listen to the words!" She laughs. "I have always gravitated to musicians who really loved songwriting, even if they didn't write songs themselves, and I think you can always tell when someone is listening to what the song is about. You can hear it in their playing."

This is one of the main reasons why Tuttle chose the legendary Jerry Douglas to co-produce *Crooked Tree*. She knew Douglas would be mindful of the broader mission, the golden rule for any songwriter that says everything has to work around the vocals and the lyrics because what you are singing about matters.

"I know he backs up songs so beautifully and cares what they are about, and doesn't just play notes and notes over them if it is not calling for them," she says. "There is a balance to the music. When I think about it, at the time we were recording this album we were just trying to strike a balance between being true to the tradition and still keeping those tempos up and featuring virtuosic playing, but also making it a songwriter record as well."

Tuttle grew up in San Francisco's Bay Area and moved to Boston when she was 19 to study at Berklee, before settling in Nashville in 2015. She says moving has given her an outsider's perspective, the aesthetic distance to see things from a different angle. Some of *Crooked Tree* sounds like it draws upon the American literary canon as much as its songbook, no more so than on "Flatland Girl," which is like something that could have been adapted from John Steinbeck's notebook.

MOLLY TUTTLE
GOLDEN HIGHWAY
CROOKED TREE

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Crooked Tree
"Flatland Girl," "Dooley's Farm," "Crooked Tree," "Goodbye Girl," "Grass Valley"

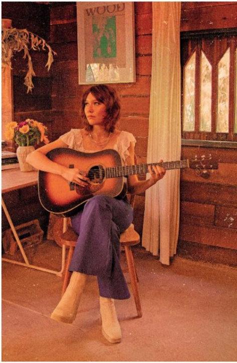
"Thank you for that compliment," she says. "I love John Steinbeck. I read a lot of his books in high school, and especially growing up in the Bay Area, reading his books and going to Cannery Row. I feel like he really influenced that area. When I wrote 'Flatland Girl,' it was very slow and mournful, and we made it peppy and did the classic bluegrass thing where it sounds really happy but you are saying something that is really sad."

When Tuttle and Douglas were working out the songs on *Crooked Tree*, they soon decided to record it live, with as many bodies in the room as possible. Strings — mandolin, banjo, fiddle, guitar and upright bass — suspend Tuttle's compositions in richly textured, organic sound. It's a three-dimensional and immersive record, just as a bluegrass show is. These songs might also evolve in the moment, Tuttle says, liable to be augmented by improv when presented before an audience. What you hear recorded on *Crooked Tree* is just "a screenshot."

"I have played the songs a bunch live and things have changed," she says. "For this music, because it is such an organic style and so much of the album was inspired by jam sessions and bluegrass festivals, we really wanted to record it as live as possible. Hopefully you can hear that on the record."

Tracking was done on a pair of custom acoustics from Pre-War Guitars, a North Carolina company specializing in boutique builds inspired by vintage Martin and Gibson. Tuttle's are based on old Martin D-18 and D-28 dreadnoughts. She prefers a skinnier neck than some of the clubbier profiles found on 1930s models.

She also likes a narrow-ish 1 11/16-inch (43mm) nut width, which is easier for a flatpicker to navigate. Her style leans on the clawhammer techniques that Michael Stadler taught her. Clawhammer guitar migrated to guitar from Appalachian banjo players and involves parking the guitar in an a banjo-esque open tuning, like Gsus4. But listening to her talk, bluegrass is an invitation to introduce any style you can imagine to the sound. Once you have the rudiments of bluegrass orthodoxy down, everything else is fair game. Players like Tuttle have proved that. Billy Strings, too. Art, and not least music, never moves forward when we handle it with silk gloves and respect. It is a living thing.



"If you know three chords, you can strum along," Tuttle says. "You can add whatever you want and make it your own. That's what Bill Monroe did with it when he was first putting his band together. It is just part of the tradition."

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

From hair metal to his *Sgt. Pepper's* tribute, these are the cuts Andy Timmons considers his finest.

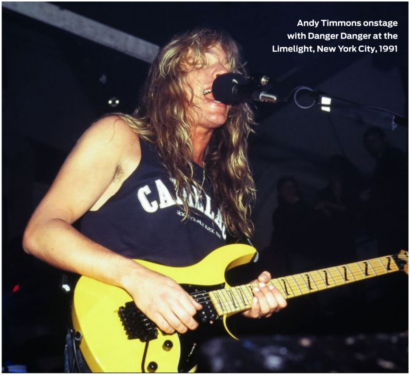
BY MARK McSTEA

IN A VARIED career that is now more than three decades old, Andy Timmons has made his mark in genres ranging from glam metal and pop to hard rock and jazz fusion. He first came to prominence with the hair-metal band Danger Danger, which scored a handful of hit singles and albums between 1989 and 1992. His guitar solos were always a highlight of the band's work, combining dazzling technique with hooky riffs, but the musical format was limiting. Timmons found much more room to stretch out after the band's 1993 breakup when he returned to his previous role, playing fusion with the Andy Timmons Band. He released two essential instrumental rock albums, *Ear X-Tacy*, in 1994 and *Ear X-Tacy 2*, in 1997, with the best tracks from each combined for the compilation *That Was Then, This Is Now: The Best of X-Tacy*, released in 2002 as his debut on Steve Vai's Favored Nations label.

Timmons spent almost 15 years in the unlikely role of musical director for Olivia Newton John's live band and continued to work on a variety of sessions, while also recording with Simon Phillips and delivering one of his strongest albums, *Resolution*, in 2006. But undoubtedly the greatest demonstration of his ability to wring the maximum expression from his instrument was highlighted on the 2011 release *Andy Timmons Band Plays Sgt. Pepper*, where he conveyed the essence of the various melodies, harmonies and bass lines with just one guitar and no overdubs.

Timmons has just released *Electric Truth* (Timstone Records), which, with its combination of rock, funk and fusion sounds, perfectly encapsulates the essence of his style. "I think that's true," he tells *Guitar Player*. "My foundation is as a rock player, but my love of jazz informs everything that I do. I studied music for a couple of years at University of Miami, but even before that, my first guitar teacher when I was 16 — and I was already playing rock in bands by that time — was a huge Joe Pass and Barney Kessel fan. He started giving me records to check out. I think that even though I'm playing rock, my note choice and feel comes from a jazz influence, and of course I also love blues. I think that's the same for any player: What resonates for them and filters through them comes out in their own playing. I had the benefit of an older brother. He was 12 when I was born in 1963, and he exposed me to so much great music: the Kinks, the Beatles, the Yardbirds and the Dave Clark 5, and then Jeff Beck and Elvis Costello in the '70s."

Timmons adopted a new approach for the recording of *Electric Truth*, recording quickly with a group of studio musicians pulled together by blues-rock guitarist, singer-songwriter and producer Josh Smith. "It was fun, because it was a little off the beaten path for me," Timmons says. "I'd really enjoyed seeing a lot of things Josh had done on YouTube. He told me that he'd just finished building a recording studio in L.A. and suggested that I come out to record. I was going out for NAMM 2020, so I went out three days early to cut the tracks at his


Andy Timmons onstage with Danger Danger at the Limelight, New York City, 1991

place. I always love the feel of the bands that he puts together, so I knew it would be great. We did the whole record in two days, then added overdubs on the third day. It was a really fast way of working."

The first track to be showcased from the album was "EWF." "It is pretty funky. It's very much a tribute to Al McKay and Earth, Wind & Fire," Timmons explains. "That was all live from start to finish. That's the only way to really get that feel. The quality of the band that Josh put together made it really easy to find that groove and make the track work."

Although he's known for his instrumental work, Timmons is a fan of John Lennon's and Elvis Costello's voices and hints that a vocal album may be on the horizon. "I do write a lot of songs with lyrics, but I am never tethered to a particular word when I'm composing a melody," he says. "A lot of songs are inspired by emotions rather than something that could be expressed verbally. Having said that, I've got a lot of songs that I've written and a lot of unfinished songs that I'm planning to complete, a lot of which could well be in a vocal-and–acoustic guitar style."

Timmons took time out to speak with *Guitar Player* about his extensive catalog and tell the stories behind five essential tracks from his long career.

"BEAT THE BULLET"
DANGER DANGER, *SCREW IT!* (1991)

"As a career highlight, *Screw It!* is right up there. It was my first album and such an exciting time. Growing up, I dreamed of making records. By the time we hit with Danger Danger, I'd almost given up on that idea. I was in my mid 20s and already thinking that I wanted to become a great player and be a session guy. Next thing I knew, we were opening shows for Kiss, touring the world and selling a couple of million albums. Danger Danger had bigger hits, but 'Beat the Bullet' is a favorite of mine. I really like its feel and my own playing on it. It's got some interesting flavors with the jazzy, Spanish kind of intro and outro.

"Even though I was in this kind of pop-metal band or hair band or whatever, I'd already been down the path of playing fusion, jazz and classical guitar, so coming back full circle to Danger Danger was great. I'd started off as a '70s rock kid who loved Kiss, Ted Nugent and Rush. I worked on this solo with my four-track cassette player, playing the section over and over to work out exactly what I was going to play. Those songs provided a very small moment to make a big melodic statement, and at that time you really wanted to inject a bit of flash — some guitar pyrotechnics — into your solos. Ultimately, you want to create something that really serves the song and lifts it a notch. I think I did it with this one."

> **"I HAD TO REINVENT HOW I WAS DOING THINGS AS I'D BECOME INSPIRED TO TRY THIS NEW APPROACH"**

"CRY FOR YOU"
ANDY TIMMONS, *EAR X-TACY* (1994)

"I had the Andy Timmons Band before I joined Danger Danger and had recorded my first demo, which was an instrumental rock guitar, track. Most of those songs ended up on my first solo record, *Ear X-Tacy*, which featured 'Cry for You.' Like every other serious guitarist, I'd take whatever work I could get with a guitar in my hands. I was in cover bands, I was freelancing, and I was completely happy doing that. It was basically what I got back into doing after Danger Danger broke up. I think the live version of this song that I did with Simon Phillips, which is on YouTube, is the significant version of this track. I was working with his fusion band, and he got asked to take part in the 90th anniversary concerts for Hoshino. We played with some of the other guys there, like Paul Gilbert. We did some of Simon's tunes, and I was asked to pick one of mine, which was 'Cry for You.' I remember the gig vividly, because there were so many of my friends and heroes there, like Paul and Steve Vai. Knowing they were watching added an extra edge, and I knew that I had to really step up. Also, the video was professionally recorded, and although it was never officially released, some bootlegs snuck out on to YouTube and that became a way that a lot of people got to know me after Danger Danger. Once that video got out, it really raised my level of exposure."

"DELIVER US"
ANDY TIMMONS BAND, *RESOLUTION* (2006)

"I picked this because it's one of my favorite tracks from *Resolution*, my second album for Steve Vai's Favored Nations label, and it was a real change in the way that I approached recording. The previous album had been a compilation of things that I'd done earlier [*2002's* That Was Then, This Is Now]. There

STEVE EICHNER/GETTY IMAGES

was one new track that I recorded for that compilation called 'Falling Down,' which was just the one guitar all the way through. Steve had said to me that he liked the way that track sounded, where he could hear the one guitar, the fingers on the frets, et cetera.

"So after finishing the basic sessions for *Resolution*, I started to think that it was very much like so many other solo guitar albums, with layers of guitars and whatever. I started remembering what Steve had said about just using the one guitar, and I wondered if I could do the whole record like that, with no overdubs. So I scrapped everything that I'd recorded, re-learned solos and ideas that I'd come up with, and then recorded each track with just the one guitar part. I gave myself the permission to compose every note on the album though. I didn't worry about the fusion mindset that I had, where I thought you needed to improvise like Steve Lukather or Larry Carlton. The thing then is to focus on the tone. If there's just one guitar, then that tone had better be pretty strong if it's going to carry the ball. I took a lot of time on that album. I think I spent a couple of weeks really getting my sound right. Everything was mic placement and hands. I had to reinvent how I was doing things as I'd become inspired to try this new approach. I think the encouragement from Steve really sparked that new direction."

"STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER"

ANDY TIMMONS, *ANDY TIMMONS BAND PLAYS SGT. PEPPER* (2011)

"In some ways, this track was the next logical step after *Resolution*, as I carried through what I'd learned from making that album. Initially, it was just a one-off idea to do an arrangement of 'Strawberry Fields Forever.' I can't even remember now what inspired me to do it. I think I just found the chords one day as I was playing. We started doing it live, and I was on a tour in Italy, and the promoter said to me that it was getting such a strong reaction that I should think about doing a whole night of Beatles songs the next time I was there. I thought, Are you kidding? [*laughs*] It was hard enough to pull off just that one song!

At The Ultimate Guitar Experience Tour in 2016

"But the suggestion got lodged in my head and set off a spark. I began to wonder if I could do it the way that I did *Resolution*, with just the one guitar part. Having done this track, the next song I thought of trying was 'Lucy in the Sky', which had that great intro. That led me to thinking, What if I could play the whole *Sgt. Pepper's* album on one guitar? Not with any intention of recording it — this was just for my own entertainment and satisfaction. It became almost like a hobby for a couple of years. I was always wondering how I could incorporate in one linear fashion the chords, the melody, the string lines and the sound effects. I didn't sit down with the record working things out; it was literally from my memory, reasoning that all the moments that needed to be in place to capture the spirit would be what I could remember. I think that's what made it interesting, rather than copying the record note for note, which has been done before."

> **"THE PROMOTER SAID I SHOULD THINK ABOUT DOING A WHOLE NIGHT OF BEATLES SONGS. I THOUGHT, ARE YOU KIDDING?"**

"GRACE"

ANDY TIMMONS, *ELECTRIC TRUTH* (2022)

"Although I love playing all kinds of music, ballads give me the big emotional release that I like to have in a show or on a record. The title 'Grace' and the inspiration for this came after I went to see one of the Experience Hendrix tours and got to hang out with a lot of great players. Billy Cox was on the tour, and I got the chance to spend a lot of time with him. He's a wonderful, sweet cat, and I really had a vibe with his wife, Brenda. She's a very sharp, soulful lady. In our conversation, it came up that they'd been married for over 50 years. I asked what the secret was, and she said, 'Grace.' I was thinking about them when I wrote this. The Hendrix feel on the guitars is very deliberate. I played this on an old, white '65 Strat, trying to get that flavor that Jimi would have had when he first went to London. I believe he was playing a white '65 Strat at that point. When I bought it, it had a really bad red refinish, plus a lot of other issues that made it much more affordable. [*laughs*] It just happened to sound great, so I had it resprayed. I sent the track to Billy and Brenda, and I was really pleased that they felt the spirit that I intended."

LARRY HULST/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

AMP
CAB
round
chime
punch
a
b
c
DRIVE
LEVEL
MIDDLE
TREBLE
BASS
ROOM
FAV
ON
IRIDIUM
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For the first time ever, the authentic sound and feel of a real tube amp driving a perfectly-matched speaker cabinet in a great-sounding room is available in a pedal-sized enclosure. With no menus to dive through, IR-based speaker cabinets and mono or true stereo operation, your path to getting killer tones when going direct just took a major shortcut.

strymon.

Chime Cut

With its unusually bright but beefy tone, the Rickenbacker 365 delivers a high-quality rock and roll sound that can't be had from any other electric.

ANY DISCUSSION OF Rickenbackers from the 1960s will usually bring to mind the guitars of George Harrison (the 360/12), John Lennon (the 325) and Roger McGuinn (the 360/12 and custom 370/12). While the groundbreaking 360/12 12-string made the most sensational splash of the decade, powering the jangle behind groundbreaking recordings like the Beatles' "Ticket to Ride" and the Byrds' "Eight Miles High," it was, like most electric 12-strings, of limited use. And while Lennon did much to reveal the 325's charms, for my money it's hard to beat the 365 for straight-up six-string versatility, upmarket looks and classic features.

The 365 was arguably the lineup's cornerstone through the company's heyday. The model is exactly like the 360 six-string but adds Rickenbacker's Accent vibrato tailpiece, a simple bent-spring unit that has limited travel and tends to send the guitar out of tune pretty quickly. That aside, the 365 has features that make it both a classic Rickenbacker and a great choice by any standards for everything from clanging power chords to chiming arpeggio work. At the same time, it's a much better lead guitar than many people give it credit for.

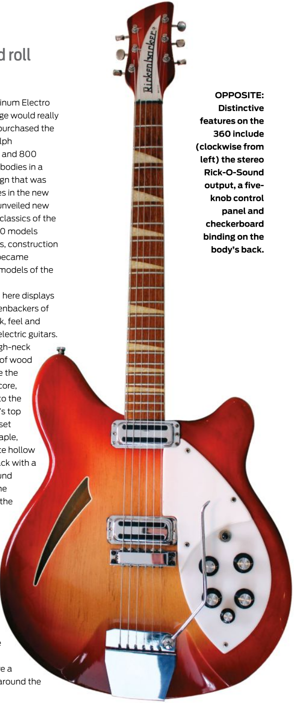
Rickenbacker's 1960s resurgence was ironic, considering its seminal role in the electric guitar's development. Founded in 1931 as Ro-Pat-In, the California-based company was among the first to develop a viable electro-magnetic pickup and the first to debut a production solidbody electric guitar when it released the cast-aluminum Electro A22 "Frying Pan" in '32. The range would really take off in 1953 when F.C. Hall purchased the company from its founder, Adolph Rickenbacker. The Combo 600 and 800 guitars of 1954 had solid wood bodies in a modernistic dual-cutaway design that was clearly aimed to accelerate sales in the new market. In 1958, Rickenbacker unveiled new designs that led to the familiar classics of the '60s, with the early 330 and 360 models foreshadowing the body shapes, construction methods and electronics that became standard on the more upscale models of the following decades.

The 1967 model 365 shown here displays several features unique to Rickenbackers of the era and essential to the look, feel and sound of these rather unusual electric guitars. Central to the design is a through-neck made from multiple laminates of wood that come together to comprise the guitar's neck and central body core, which runs from the neck heel to the sloped rear portion of the body's top where the tailpiece sits. This is set into a body back made from maple, routed out from behind to create hollow chambers and capped off in back with a thin slice of maple. A single bound "scimitar" sound hole reveals the semi-hollow upper bout, while the chambers of the lower are covered by a large, two-tiered pickguard.

Our featured example is finished in the bright-red sunburst known as Fireglo, while Mapleglo (natural) and Jetglo (black) were also available. The softly radiused edges of the body's front meant that no binding could be applied there, but the relatively fancy 360 and 365 models have a tasteful checkerboard binding around the flat back of the guitar.

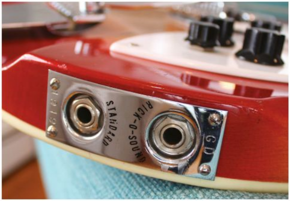
ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

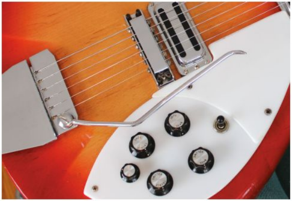
> Semi-hollow maple body
> Laminated maple/mahogany/maple "through neck"
> Bubinga fingerboard with shark's-tooth inlays, 24.75-inch scale length
> Two single-coil "toaster top" pickups
> Rick-O-Sound wiring with stereo and mono outputs



OPPOSITE: Distinctive features on the 360 include (clockwise from left) the stereo Rick-O-Sound output, a five-knob control panel and checkerboard binding on the body's back.

BY DAVE HUNTER





The relatively thin neck on these Rickenbacker models presents another of the guitars' idiosyncrasies. They carry dual truss rods that can be accessed for adjustment via the long, pointed plastic cover on the headstock that bears the Rickenbacker logo, and are capped with a bound fretboard of a dark red-brown hardwood. Often mistaken for rosewood, this fretboard is usually made from bubinga (sometimes called African rosewood, though that is in fact something different, and bubinga is not rosewood, properly speaking). On the 365 and 360, these 'boards carry decorative shark's-tooth inlays made from something referred to as crushed pearl, and unlike the dark-wood fingerboards of most makers, they are sealed in varnish.

Amid all the quirks and curiosities so far — most of them unique to Rickenbacker guitars — we have yet to discuss the electronics, which are among the more esoteric features of these appealingly odd instruments. The engine room here comprises a pair of single-coil pickups that have become known as "toaster tops" for the appearance of their dual-slotted covers. Sometimes mistaken for mini-humbuckers thanks to these parallel slots, they're actually made with a single row of six Alnico pole pieces at the center of a coil wound with 44-AWG wire. The fineness of this wire contributes to resistance readings that appear hot for single coils, but in fact they're relatively low-output pickups, which is partly responsible for their characteristically bright, jangly tone.

THE 365 HAS FEATURES THAT MAKE IT A CLASSIC AND A MUCH BETTER LEAD GUITAR THAN MANY PEOPLE GIVE IT CREDIT FOR

On the 365, these are wired for Rick-O-Sound stereo, which routes each pickup to a separate output on the TRS jack, to be sent to two amps via a special junction box or a Y cable. A standard monaural output is also provided. Controls include individual tone and volume for each pickup, positioned in reverse of most, with the former above the latter.

The enigmatic "fifth knob" — much misunderstood and often misdescribed — is a second volume control for the neck pickup, wired in series as a variable resistor, which allows the player to add varying amounts of that unit to the bridge pickup's signal when the selector is in the middle position. Yes, that can also be done using the pickup's conventional volume control, but this control does it differently and seems to be designed, in part, to compensate for the odd tone cap perpetually wired in series with the bridge pickup, which saps lower frequencies from that unit in normal operation. For this reason, many players bypass the cap to keep it out of circuit entirely, and only then do you really hear what the bridge pickup is capable of.

Given all the above, a good 365 presents a sound that really can't be achieved from any other make of electric guitar. Call it chime with beef, jangle with meat, bright with girth… whatever — it's rock and roll and pop-sugar sparkle all at once, and it was the secret ingredient in countless hits of the '60s and beyond. Bob Weir used one back in the Grateful Dead's early days, while Pete Townshend, Tom Petty, Mike Campbell, Paul Weller, Peter Buck and many other guitarists made stellar use of similar iterations of the sound with their own preferred Rickenbacker models. As firmly rooted as it seems to be in Mersey beat anthems and West Coast jangle-pop gems, a great Rickenbacker will surprise you with how easily it weaves its magic into all kinds of contemporary music beneath your fingertips.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVE HUNTER

BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Cry of Life

Howlin' Wolf and Hubert Sumlin gave the blues its voice on these classic cuts.

HOWLIN' WOLF
CHICAGO
26
Golden Years
SINGLE ALBUM
CH 9183

I OFTEN ASK my students, "What does *love* sound like? What does *hate* sound like? What does *humiliation* sound like?" More often than not, they're stymied by this task. I tell them, "There's no wrong answer!" and urge them to say something personal, to be brave on their instrument and express the intangible. In short, I urge them to follow the example of the music contained on *Howlin' Wolf*, which is the sound of someone crying, "I'm alive!"

Born Chester Arthur Burnett in 1910, Wolf was influenced by seeing Charlie Patton play and by hearing Blind Lemon Jefferson, Ma Rainey and Lonnie Johnson, to name a few. His music sounds drenched in danger and overflows with raw sexuality, qualities exemplified on this long-player, which is also known as the Rockin' Chair Album after its cover photo. Originally issued on Chess in 1962, the LP is a collection of iconic singles issued between June 1957 to December 1961, and to my ears these sides are as fine as blues can be.

The tracks feature the brilliant guitar work of Hubert Sumlin, as well as a who's who of blues sidemen, including pianist Otis Spann, bassist Willie Dixon, drummer Sam Lay and a slew of guitarists (among them, Buddy Guy) and other contributors. It's easy to be confused about who's playing when you have so many great musicians, but Sumlin's guitar provides a voice equally as distinct as Wolf's. Hubert's sound and phrasing leap out on equal footing with Wolf's growling vocal style. I can't imagine what it would have been like to see this group live. I would probably have to start throwing chairs and tables.

Every track on this LP is fantastic, but I'll summarize with a few cuts. Side one starts with "Shake for Me," which might be my favorite Wolf track ever. The groove is infectious and somehow otherworldly. The message is predominantly X-rated and, Hubert's solo is full of quirky hooks and filled with sweeps, slides and vocal-like bends. It's a masterpiece. As usual, Wolf combines poetry and melody, and the result is frighteningly hair-raising. "Wang Dang Doodle" is another personal favorite, a Willie Dixon original on which the group showcases its high-level ensemble playing. Every part the musicians play demands attention, and they fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Here again, Sumlin's guitar solo and fills sound glorious and contemporary.

WOLF AND HUBERT SUMLIN REMIND US EVERY TIME WHAT REAL BLUES IS ALL ABOUT

Side two's "Howlin for My Baby" is another example of great ensemble playing that has the mindset of a hit, with an insistent hook that drills home. It's played with a looseness that is perpetually infectious, but it's dripping with humanity and a sound that remains fresh even today. Add in the tracks "Red Rooster," "Spoonful" and "Little Baby," among many others, and you have what is simply one of the greatest blues records of all time.

Outside of this column I'm leery to write any opinion. There's a lot of noise out there, so before I write anything on social media, I ask myself why my opinion matters, and 99 percent of the time I conclude it doesn't matter whatsoever. Why share my dissatisfaction with the army of white dudes playing the blues, or ponder why a guy shredding pentatonics on a Paul Reed Smith doesn't sound "blue" to me at all? It's like watching a bullfighter with a padded crotch strutting in a bull ring without a bull.

But there's an answer for those of us who want to experience the blues at its best, and in a dramatic arena where it sounds vital. It's here on *Howlin' Wolf*, where Wolf and Hubert Sumlin remind us on cut after cut what real blues is all about.

Jim Campilongo has 14 critically acclaimed instrumental records available on vinyl, CD and digital download at jimcampilongo.com.

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CELESTION

"AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, CHURCH IS THE GREATEST MUSICAL FOUNDATION AND SCHOOLING ONE COULD EVER HAVE"

BETTER CALL WALLS

With old-school gospel roots and new-school guitar chops, Erick Walls has emerged as one of today's most in-demand guitarists.

BY JUDE GOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC WILLIAMS

WATCHING SUPERSTAR RAPPER Nas perform a medley of his biggest songs on this year's Grammy Awards telecast, it was all but impossible not to notice his badass backing band. Dressed head to toe in white and led by renowned musical director and bassist Adam Blackstone, the 12-piece group — replete with a full horn section and a grand piano — was more hip-hop orchestra than band. And if you were a keen-eyed guitar aficionado watching, your eyes surely gravitated toward the cool guitarist stage right, wearing shades and rocking a Paul Reed Smith Silver Sky through two Fender amps.

Ironically, of the 10 million or so viewers watching the live broadcast that night, probably only a few had any idea that the guitarist behind Nas had twice as many Grammy wins — two — as the artist he was backing.

That guitarist is Erick Walls, and this was just another night in his busy life working alongside the world's top pop, R&B and gospel stars. The roster of artists who have hired Walls over the past two decades spans from Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Toni Braxton, Dave Matthews, the Isley Brothers, Kanye West, Mariah Carey, Beck, Rihanna and Jay-Z to Jennifer Hudson, Alicia Keys, Michael McDonald, George Duke, the Chicks and gospel greats Kirk Franklin, Beverly Crawford and Shirley Caesar. And those Grammy wins? Walls got them for his session work on huge albums by Beyoncé (*Lemonade*) and John Legend (*Bigger Love*).

Walls' guitar odyssey started around age six, in church. "Actually, drums were my first instrument," he reveals. "Next came piano. I zeroed in on guitar at about age 10, when I got my first electric — a cheap Fender Squier Strat with a humbucker in the bridge. I soon outgrew it, but it put me on the path of having that humbucker there. My number one guitar nowadays is the Grosh Retro Classic I've had for years, and it has that same HSS pickup arrangement."

Walls' early musical education came from being around his father, George Walls, who was a gospel singer, recording artist and preacher. "All my earliest memories are of watching my father rehearse and going with him to the studio and everywhere else," Walls says. "When I was a kid, the guitar player in my father's band was an amazing young guy named Jackson Russell, who was really rooted in the gospel quartet tradition. The rhythm part of what he did is what really got me excited. I'd watch Jackson do that rhythmic hybrid-picked stuff and be like, Oh, man, that looks like fun. And that's what really drew me into guitar and started me on my journey. Jackson is still around. I talk to him from time to time."

Walls has always felt that the guitar is as much a percussion instrument as it is a harmonic one, and his dedication to becoming adept in both these realms has paid off in wonderful ways. It's landed him and his thumb pick (a hallmark of his style) on superstar stages and studios around the world, allowed him to build a great home studio and helped him raise his family.

In other words, the guitar has given Walls everything — everything, that is, except maybe two days off in a row.

I discovered your playing after seeing a YouTube video of you performing at Kevin Wilson's 2011 Guitar Summit. I was immediately struck by the way you combine tasteful vibrato-bar moves with a funky thumb-pick attack.

Erick Walls on the set of ABC's *Boy Band*

I still play and record with flat picks from time to time, but my first guitar was an acoustic, and seven-year-old me couldn't quite hold onto the pick when I was playing hard. Naturally, the pick would fall into the guitar, and I couldn't get it out. But being from Durham, North Carolina, where there is a bluegrass scene, I remember going to a bluegrass festival and seeing some guys playing with thumb picks and thinking, That will solve the problem. So I started using them myself.

As I've progressed, though, the thumb pick has become more than just a practical solution to that pick-dropping problem. It has become a really cool tool that allows me to play more dynamically, especially when I'm doing a hybrid-picking part that uses both the pick and the fingers. The cool thing about thumb picks is that while they do have a darker tone than, say, a Fender Medium, they're brighter than the sound of your fingers. So the contrast between the snappier pick downstrokes and darker-sounding finger upstrokes is very interesting.

As for the bar, I try to use it in a subtle way. On the Grosh, the bridge is floating quite a bit, which can allow for extreme vibrato, but I just add a touch of it here and there. I get in for a second, then out.

How did you end up moving to Los Angeles?

My first stop was to do some studies at Berklee in Boston, but my goal was always to get to L.A., because when I was growing up, a lot of the music that I was into — the gospel stuff and everything else — was produced out there. I was a big fan of Quincy Jones' stuff and a lot of pop music from the '70s and '80s, and being someone who would always read the credits, I started noticing that everything was being made in L.A. I'd start seeing the same names over and over — studios such as A&M and Sunset Sound, and players like Larry Carlton, Ricky Lawson and Paul Jackson, Jr. I began to realize that L.A. had something special going on. So I knew I had to get here.

“THE THUMB PICK ALLOWS ME TO PLAY MORE DYNAMICALLY, ESPECIALLY WHEN I'M DOING A HYBRID-PICKING PART”

I jumped at the first L.A. opportunity that presented itself, and that was when I linked up with some people back home who had a label deal with Atlantic Records. I came out and ended up working on an album by Sunshine Anderson called *Your Woman*. She had a hit on that album [*“Heard It All Before”*], so it sold about 800,000 copies. That was a nice introduction to the music business for me, because we were out of the '90s, and things were good. Budgets were huge in that era, and the glitz and glamour of it all was amazing.

Why did you run two amps at this year's Grammys?

I like stereo effects, which is why I had those two Deluxes up there. I brought my big pedalboard that night so I could do a couple ambient guitar things. I particularly love the Eventide H9 pedal. The stereo spread on it is pristine, and it has so much depth. The Carnegie Hall reverb, for example, has tons of detail and is just breathtaking. And running the analog delay with a stereo ping-pong setting is great. The H9 is super easy to program, too, using the H9 Control app on your phone via Bluetooth. And each time Eventide updates it, it's basically a new pedal! It's probably the most useful multi-effects out there.

TRACK STAR

Erick Walls reflects on five favorite sessions.

“ALL I NEED (LIVE),” “ALL I NEED (LIVE) PT. 2”

MIAMI MASS CHOIR, *LIVE AT THE ADRIENNE ARSHT CENTER*

MIAMI
MASS
CHOIR
LIVE

“This song was tracked live and is a very important moment for me because it features both myself and the great Jonathan Dubose Jr. on guitar. I consider Jonathan the father of modern gospel guitar playing. He kind of wrote the book on it, and he’s been a hugely influential part of my playing. From his work with Edwin and Walter Hawkins and the Hawkins Family and other pioneers of modern gospel on forward, he was one of the first guitar players to develop the vocabulary to play over more progressive, tension-heavy gospel changes. By fragmenting chords, playing off the keyboards and other approaches, he was able to bridge the gap from traditional, more triad-based gospel to more progressive stuff and find a place in the music for the guitar. In some ways it’s akin to modern R&B guitar styles. He gave guitar a voice in a landscape where it didn’t otherwise exist. You can hear Jonathan on the left side of these mixes, me on the right. He played a Strat, so, for a nice contrast, I played an ES-335.”

“HOLLYWOOD TONIGHT,” “BEST OF JOY”

MICHAEL JACKSON, *MICHAEL JACKSON*

“A career highlight for me was recording several songs with Michael Jackson in his home in Beverly Hills. He had a studio set up in his pool house, and Theron ‘Neff-U’ Feemster and I would show up there each morning at 10 a.m. and work all day with Michael. I would put down guitar and bass stuff, and Theron would do keyboard parts. Michael was big on sound design, so we’d create samples and parts. That was his thing — it was always all about the part. And even though he wasn’t a guitar player, he was so musical he understood the instrument. One time, I was playing something on the low E string, but he wanted the part to have a note even lower than E, and he instinctively knew I could tune down to play what he was hearing. So he had me put the guitar in dropped-D, though he didn’t know the actual guitar terminology for that.

“Michael passed away later that year in that same house, and the songs we did were released on the posthumous album *Michael*. Fun moments for me were playing the funk guitar parts on ‘Hollywood Tonight’ — that’s my Grosh Retro Classic straight into a Neve 1073 preamp going into Guitar Rig — and ‘Best of Joy,’ which has me playing a steel-string part on a Taylor 414.

“Michael was the most driven individual I’ve ever seen, and whatever we did, he was always like, ‘We can do it better. Let’s really dig into it this time.’ Being next to him was always mind blowing. He behaved so humbly, as if he had never accomplished a single thing, but in my mind I’m seeing footage of him playing stadiums on the *Thriller* tour.”

“WATER 4 FIRE”

BLACK WAAT3R, *BLACK WAAT3R*

BLACK WAAT3R

”My background is playing gospel stuff, but I’m also very much a product of late-’80s and -’90s pop music and MTV, including grunge stuff from Nirvana to Black Album–era Metallica. In Black Waat3r, my rock band, I mash up all my influences. ‘Water 4 Fire’ developed from a riff. My partner in the band is Stevie Notes. His father is the great songwriter Greg Perry [*Honey Cone’s “Want Ads,” Freda Payne’s “Bring the Boys Home”*], so Stevie’s been around songwriting all his life and knows how to write. When we finished the song, it had kind of a blues form — and a pretty cool solo, if I might say so myself. [*laughs*] I recorded that through a Carr Impala combo. Steve Carr is great friend of mine. I grew up maybe 30 minutes from his place in North Carolina where he makes amps, and I’ve been playing his stuff for years. The Impala is like a Deluxe on steroids. It has a real open sound and takes pedals well.”

Onstage with his Taylor 414ce

“NEWS FOR YOU”

ERIC BENÉT, *THE ONE*

“This song did well on the R&B charts, and my approach to the guitar parts was to give a nod to the classic R&B styles I love, like Al McKay’s playing with Earth, Wind & Fire. For the main guitar track — the clean track — I ran my Grosh into a Fender Vibrolux. For the lead track, I switched to a Gibson ES-335 and ran it through a Fulltone OCD pedal. I like this tune. The groove has that retro, midtempo feel. It’s a total feel-good song.”

“DADDY LESSONS”

BEYONCÉ, *LEMONADE*

“I wouldn’t say this is a country song, but it does have that country, bluesy back-porch flavor to it. I used a Taylor steel-string on it — probably the 414, because that guitar records really well. My part is very strummy. I wanted to deliver solid rhythm but also provide a little twang. Live, the song kind of became a crowd favorite. We actually performed it on the Country Music Awards with the Dixie Chicks [*now known as the Chicks*], and even recorded a second version of the song with them. And, after meeting them, I ended up working on their next album.”

VISUAL THOUGHT

The Grammys was a wonderful opportunity for me. Adam Blackstone put together a terrific band featuring lots of great New York jazz guys — Robert Glasper on piano, Keyon Harrold on trumpet, Terrace Martin on sax, to name a few — and I was running real amps. And we actually performed live. I think we were one of the few acts that did.

You do a lot of sessions with big artists in big studios. Do you find that producers nowadays don't necessarily expect you to bring in a big tube rig to mic up?

Really, at the end of the day, it's about efficiency and doing things fast. So, yeah, you want the guitar to sound great, but you also may not have the luxury of taking tons of time to mic up an amp, which is why a tool like the Kemper Profiler is so brilliant. Not only is it always going to sound good, it also gives you the option to swap out a whole rig with the turn of a knob. In times past, switching to a new rig would've taken a bunch of precious studio time. Lately, I've been using the Kemper at a lot of sessions — everything from the new John Legend album we're recording to film dates, which I do a lot of — and it works well. I really like the profiles created by Michael Britt. I use those often.

How are your pickups wired on the Grosh?

The pickups are all Lindy Fralins — two Blues Special single-coils, and, I think, a Pure P.A.F. humbucker. Not only is the humbucker splittable on that guitar but Don Grosh wired it so that, instead of a second tone knob, there's a blend pot that brings in the neck pickup. That knob allows you to get a lot of cool tones, like the neck/bridge combination. It's a versatile guitar. If I'm bringing only a Strat-style guitar, that one covers a lot of ground.

It often seems like the best musical education a guitarist can have is to grow up playing in church. It seems like that teaches you to play all the right stuff and none of the wrong stuff.

At its highest level, church music is all about the feel. It's a spiritual thing, yes, but it's also a feeling. Not to bag on any other form of learning, but, as far as I'm concerned, church is the greatest musical foundation and schooling one could ever have. If you're too young to go to a club, well, you're not too young to play in church. [*laughs*] And church has plenty of other good stuff to offer as well.

I'm friends with [*blues fusion guitarist*] Josh Smith, and we often talk about how there's a parallel between playing in church and playing in a blues club — in order to move people in either place, you have to be playing something of substance. Otherwise, what are you doing? So, when the people start jumping and up and down and are responding to what you're playing, you know you're onto something meaningful.

Playing in church is real-world experience, and it helps you develop good sensibilities. You recognize early on what works versus what doesn't. And everyone around you helps you out. If you're loud and wrong, well, somebody will probably tell you, "Nah, maybe don't do that." [*laughs*]

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BY JOE BOSSO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRIZZLEE MARTIN

THE SHRED SUMMIT

“HOW DOES ANYBODY PLAY GUITAR LIKE THAT?” Dream Theater guitarist and main man John Petrucci says, recalling his reaction when he first heard the music of Steve Morse. “It was the wildest, most incredible stuff I had ever heard. There are moments that you can pinpoint and say they were truly life-changing, and for me, hearing Steve Morse play guitar was one of them.”

It was the mid ’80s and Petrucci was a metal-crazed high schooler and budding guitarist big on Metallica, Iron Maiden and Ozzy Osbourne. “I spent most of my free time practicing, and I thought I was getting pretty good,” he says. “I could play a lot of the stuff by my heroes pretty well.” One day, a friend’s older brother gave Petrucci a mixtape of tracks by the Dixie Dregs, a band the young guitar player had vaguely heard of, along with a sage piece of advice: “You have to listen to Steve Morse.”

Petrucci didn’t know what to expect when he loaded the tape in his deck. The first song that came up was “The Bash,” an exuberant, revved-up and rocking country jam on which Morse charges out of the gate like a bucking bronco, blitzing across the fretboard and spinning wild chicken-picking licks all over the neck while keeping pace with Allen Sloan’s hyper-giddy violin lines. “It totally blew my mind,” Petrucci says. “I couldn’t understand how anybody could play like that. I wasn’t very familiar with bluegrass, but Steve mixed it with rock in such an exciting way. His technique and phrasing hooked me immediately.”

> **“STEVE MIXED BLUEGRASS WITH ROCK IN SUCH AN EXCITING WAY. HIS TECHNIQUE AND PHRASING HOOKED ME IMMEDIATELY”**
> JOHN PETRUCCI

From that moment, Morse zoomed to the top of the list as Petrucci’s favorite guitar player. “I even transcribed the song, because I wanted to learn how to play like that,” he says. “I did the deep dive and immersed myself in all things Dregs and Steve Morse. Whatever he played, I had to hear it. He became ‘the guy.’”

By Petrucci’s estimation, Morse’s impact on his guitar playing has been incalculable. “He helped bend and shape my approach to the guitar in so many ways,” he says. “The first was compositionally. I loved how he could incorporate rock, bluegrass and classical, and that added flavors to my repertoire. Technically, Steve took me to a very high level. I read about his approach to practicing, and that prompted me to apply his work ethic to my own practice routine. I said, ‘I’m going to do what he did and follow in his footsteps.’”

Happily, Petrucci reports that the oft-repeated adage “don’t meet your heroes, they’ll only disappoint you” doesn’t apply to here. After first encountering his idol at a guitar clinic Morse was conducting, Petrucci, by then a guitar star in his own right, went on to establish a peer-to-peer relationship with him. “Developing a real friendship with Steve has been remarkable,” he says. “Over the years, we’ve played together and have done some writing together. We’ve toured together, Dream Theater and the Dregs. We share the same manager, and we both have a relationship with Ernie Ball Music Man, so we’ve done a lot of events together. It’s just incredible. I love hanging out and doing signings with Steve. He’s always so smart, insightful and funny. I’m still like a kid who’s in awe of him, and I always will be.”

For his part, Morse seems similarly bedazzled by Petrucci. “I would hear him on records, and his playing was so astonishing,” he says. “I’d think, This guy just can’t be real. It’s rare to find somebody who really pushes the limits of everything that can be done on the guitar, and John does that so powerfully. I find that very inspiring.”

He recalls going backstage to meet with Petrucci before a Dream Theater show. “It was the first time I really hung out with him,” Morse says. “John was warming up, and it confirmed to me, Yep, he’s human. I thought, He’s going to start at this tempo, he’s going to increase it, and he’s going to put in the time so that when he hits the stage, he’s gonna explode. He let me witness what is usually a very private time, and that really struck me as being meaningful. It was like him telling me, ‘I’m comfortable enough with you to let you see what I do when I’m alone, because I know you’ll understand. And then I’m going to go out and kill people.’ Which he did. It was a big deal.”

Hearing this for the first time, Petrucci lets out a laugh. “And the whole time, I was freaking out inside. All I was thinking was, Oh, my god. Steve Morse is watching me warm up!”

Guitar Player recently extended an invitation to Petrucci to lead Morse in a mentor-mentee discussion about his career and shredcraft. Within minutes of the two men sitting down to chat, it became clear that this wouldn’t be a standard Q&A session but rather an engaging, relaxed and at times free-wheeling exchange between two giants of the guitar… who also happen to be very good friends. We present their conversation, with *Guitar Player* occasionally chiming in.

Steve Morse and John Petrucci photographed in Orlando, March 15, 2022

“IT’S RARE TO FIND SOMEBODY WHO REALLY PUSHES THE LIMITS OF EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE DONE ON THE GUITAR. I FIND JOHN VERY INSPIRING”

STEVE MORSE

INFLUENCES

JOHN PETRUCCI Steve, I’m reminded about something. I did an interview one time and I mentioned how you were my biggest influence, and then something happened that I’ll never forget: You called me.

STEVE MORSE Oh, yeah. I remember that!

PETRUCCI It was the coolest thing. I guess you got my number from our mutual manager, Frank Solomon. You left a message on my answering machine. It meant so much to me. In fact, we still have the answering machine with the tape and your message. I cherished it so much. It was so awesome that you did that. You didn’t even know me at the time.

MORSE Yeah, well, I was very impressed with your band. But you as a guitar player, it was so incredible to me to hear somebody at such a young age who had this command of the instrument. It wasn’t like you had this one trick, you know? And the thing about you is, you keep getting better.

PETRUCCI Oh, my…

Petrucci onstage with Dream Theater at Shibuya Kokaido in Tokyo, on their first Japanese tour, November 18, 1992

MORSE Well, it’s true. You think, This guy can’t possibly get any better, but then you do. I was listening to your last solo album [2020’s *Terminal Velocity*], and your playing is just effortless. There’s great writing and ideas, and everything musically is performed with such control. Your vibrato — it’s all right there. It’s like, I can’t handle it. [*laughs*] And you do it on each recording. I don’t know how you do it, but you do.

PETRUCCI Oh, wow… That’s such praise. Of course, my whole practice mentality came from reading articles about you — interviews in which you talked about your discipline and your own practice routine. That’s what got me into using a metronome and really putting the hours in. What inspired me about you was how you talked about setting a goal and going about achieving it, no matter how long it took. The only other person I read about who did something similar was Randy Rhoads, and how he started learning classical guitar. I’m curious: Who had that kind of impact on you?

MORSE Well, it’s kind of a long story. For me, that all started with John McLaughlin. I went to see him and the Mahavishnu Orchestra at this outdoor show at our college, only the gig was rained out and they had to set up in the cafeteria. I got to be the first person right in front of the whole band.

PETRUCCI Wow!

MORSE I was sitting on the floor and they were up on a small stage. The power and energy from the band was incredible. I was close enough to see that John McLaughlin was picking every note, and he sounded incredible. He just destroyed everybody. It was that moment where everything was like, “Yes!” It made me think playing guitar at this high level could be very effective. It was never going to be pop music or a path to riches, but it was something that interested me deeply.

In music school, I was studying piano. Everybody had to. I remember hearing my teacher talking with one of her students who was worried about an upcoming recital and said, “I don’t know. I’ve just made some mistakes.” And the teacher said, “Well, let’s go through it. Have you been practicing your four to six hours a day? Have you been doing your memory practice so you can work on the piece without being in front of the instrument? Have you done the analysis? Have you done this? Have you done that?” It was a complete checklist.

That was the level that you had to be at if you were going to play at a recital, and I just remember thinking, Wow! So that really impressed me, and it helped push me in terms of what I expected out of practice. I expected myself to be able to do what a keyboard player could do.

KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

PETRUCCI Hearing you talk about seeing McLaughlin and how he picked every note reminds me of how I felt when I heard you play "The Bash" [*from the Dixie Dregs' 1979 album,* Night of the Living Dregs]. All the guys I was into before that were really good technically, but they didn't play like that. From that point on, my whole mentality was like, I need to be able to pick every note. Then I got into Al Di Meola and other players who could pick every note. It became something of a litmus test, like, only real players can do that. You know, none of this wimpy hammer-on sweeping. [*laughs*]

Now, as I've learned about guitar since, all the techniques are awesome, and it's fun to be able to do everything. I'm not as snobby as I was as a teenager. But there was a period where I was like, "I've got to pick every note because that's what Steve Morse does."

MORSE Picking every note was a way to be more versatile. Wrist licks and those "tweedly-tweedly" pull-offs are extremely natural, and they work great for blues and rock stuff, but what about classical music and stuff where you're playing along with a horn player, a keyboard player or a violinist? I'm talking about stuff where the music doesn't necessarily lay out that well on the guitar.

PETRUCCI Exactly.

MORSE Fingering-wise, nobody knows more about that stuff than you, John. You play with [*Dream Theater keyboardist*] Jordan Rudess.

BEATING THE KEYBOARD PLAYER TO THE PUNCH

PETRUCCI Well, that leads me to a question for you, Steve. As you know, I've been playing with keyboard players for years, so I've always been in a position where they'll come up with something that feels incredibly comfortable to them, and then it's like, "Okay, play this on guitar." And I'm like, "Why are there so many fourths?" Translating it to guitar isn't always so easy. My approach is to figure out the easiest way to play it. What do you do?

MORSE Well, the first thing I try to do is beat the keyboard player to the punch.

PETRUCCI Of course! [*laughs*]

MORSE When writing something with a keyboard player, I'll say, "What was the best voicing for that other chord?" Then while they're trying to figure out what I'm talking about, I'll start thinking, Oh, this line will work, and that line will work… "Oh, by the way," I'll say, "I've got an idea for that fast part."

PETRUCCI That's awesome. I love it.

MORSE That way, I know I can play whatever it is, because I've already worked out all the possibilities. I do that every single time. Well, I mean, I try to do it. Sometimes you can get stuck. Once when I was working with Flying Colors [*Morse's prog-rock side project*], [*singer*] Neal Morse came up with something. He showed it to me, and the tempo was okay. Then [*drummer*] Mike Portnoy came in, and pretty soon the tempo got faster and faster, to the point where it was just screaming. It was almost impossible. I had to keep changing the fingering to keep up. It was just one of those things: You do what you have to do.

PETRUCCI I hear you.

MORSE You had mentioned fourths. When I was at the peak of my technique, I could play fourths across the strings at about 80 percent of the speed that I could play fast single notes — linear notes, rather. Guitar players tend to think more linear, and when you come up with lines and present them to a keyboard player, it's funny watching them learn it, because it's not natural for them. They have to use two hands. It's very easy for us to repeat a note and do a tremolo thing, but it's really hard for them.

WORKING HARDER

GUITAR PLAYER John, you had mentioned hearing Steve play "The Bash" the first time on record. What did you think the first time you saw him play it live? Was it with the Dregs?

PETRUCCI No, it was with the Steve Morse Band. When he played clubs like My Father's Place [*a former music venue in Roslyn, New York*] with the Dregs, I was too young to get into bars. I kind of missed that whole period. I first saw Steve when he put out *The Introduction* [*the Steve Morse Band's 1984 debut album*]

AWAKEN THE MASTER

JOHN PETRUCCI'S SIX EXERCISES FOR HIGHER AUTHORITY.

BY AMIT SHARMA

1. DON'T OVERTHINK IT

"You'd be surprised, out of all the progressive and technical moments in our music, the favorites for the audience are usually the big, simpler riffs that grab your attention. You have to show restraint and not overwrite or overthink your parts. You'll come up with something good and then that voice will start running in your head: How many times have I done this? Is this too typical? Am I repeating myself? And you have to shut off that voice and carry on. Sometimes you will stumble on something that just has that special thing. If it feels good, keep going!"

2. EMBRACE THE AMBIGUITY OF NINTHS

"I've used ninth chords in old songs like 'Pull Me Under,' as well as more recent stuff, like 'Invisible Monster.' I actually stole the chord from [*Rush guitarist*] Alex Lifeson, who was the first person I remember hearing use that kind of sound. It felt cooler than a power chord. It didn't really have a major or minor thing. It's basically two fifth intervals stacked on top of each other, which always seems to resonate really well on a guitar. You can easily turn a ninth into a minor third, or a major third, so it's quite ambiguous — which leaves you more options for melody as a songwriter. It's very different to, say, the flat-five chord, which I use a lot in 'The Alien,' which is more doomy and ominous. I guess we can all thank Tony Iommi for that one, right?"

3. USE CHROMATIC EXERCISES TO BUILD SPEED

"If there was one alternate-picking exercise that helped me most — my desert island exercise, if you will — it would be the classic four-notes-per-string chromatic run, which I actually learned out of a magazine. I just drilled that thing, and even to this day it's still a great exercise for me, as are variations of it. Obviously, it has an even number of notes on each string, so every time you change to the next string it's a downstroke. To vary it, you just reverse the picking and start on an upstroke. Honestly, if one exercise helped my picking the most, it's the simple chromatic thing. It definitely works!"

4. GET USED TO INSIDE PICKING

"That was absolutely a big discovery for me. I was wondering why certain runs were giving me trouble and why certain licks felt more comfortable than others. Once I discovered that 'pick being trapped' thing, it made me understand what to work on. If you take that chromatic picking exercise — four frets in a row on the low-E string — but add one note on the A string, you will encounter some inside picking there on your way back. It's important to know things like that because you might be able to wail through that exercise, but the inside picking from that extra note might slow you down."

5. KNOW WHEN TO SLOW DOWN

"It's a great compositional technique to create some release. 'The Alien' has a lot of tension in it, rhythmically and modally. We're playing in 17/8, which is weird and not a normal signature people can tap their feet to. That creates tension because the listener is trying to wrap their head around the feel of it. And there's a lot of flat fives there, which creates tension modally — it feels very dark and mysterious. So when the first solo comes along one minute in, it's like a compositional breath of fresh air. It switches to 12/8, which is really comfortable. It feels like you're floating because the melody and time signature lift you up and give you a sense of conclusion. We play that tension-and-release game a lot in our writing. It helps take the listener on a journey and makes the song more interesting. You never know what's going to happen, so when it does, there's an emotional effect."

RAYON RICHARDS

"INSIDE PICKING WAS A BIG DISCOVERY FOR ME"

6. UNDERSTAND HOW SCALES AND CHORDS RELATE TO EACH OTHER

"The first time I became aware of harmonic minor was when I heard Yngwie Malmsteen. I was like, 'Oh wow, that's a cool sound!' And then I went back and started listening to other music, identifying it being used in all kinds of different places. I still think in terms of the parent key, so E Phrygian dominant would lead me back to A harmonic minor, because that's how I learned all my scales. It was more about how the scale was related to whatever chord I was playing. Not everybody thinks that way, but that's what works for me. If I'm in E Mixolydian, I will be thinking in A major. And I even take it a step further, where I'm more comfortable with the relative minor of a key. So I actually think of A major like F♯ minor. In my mind, E Mixolydian is F♯ minor with an E under it."

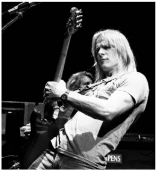
and he was playing with a trio on Long Island. Seeing him live was amazing. I was blown away by several things. [*to Morse*] You guys were a trio but you sounded huge — so full and musical. I loved your guitar sound. And, of course, you had multiple volume pedals, and you were bringing delays in, and chorus. It sounded so beautiful. You were playing lines that I had only heard on tapes and records, but now you're playing them before my eyes. You were sort of combining parts. I was amazed that all this sound was coming out of one guitar player. I would go to see you again and again, and I remember having this feeling that you kept getting better every time.

MORSE That's very kind. I was trying to get better.

PETRUCCI Actually, I met you before that. I was a student at the Berklee College of Music, and I went to see you at a clinic at a music shop right by the school. I remember waiting in line, and you walked in with your gig bag. I was freaking out, like, "Oh, my God. There he is! That's him!" [*laughs*] At the clinic, you taught all this stuff, and I don't know if I had written it out while you were talking, but I immediately went back and learned it all. I still practice the things that you taught at that clinic. I was 18 years old.

You taught me something very valuable that day about how you hold your pick, the way you sort of make this pocket so you can mute certain strings while letting other strings ring. That's something I've used forever.

Morse onstage with the Dixie Dregs at Center Stage, in Atlanta, February 14, 1992



MORSE You mentioned that period when I did the trio stuff. Doing that, I could use a lot of my classical left hand to try to make the voicings bigger. You have to work a little harder in a trio format. And, of course, I could use [*bassist*] Dave LaRue's talent.

PETRUCCI Whenever I would see you in those trio situations, you did look like you were working really hard. You had all these pedals, and you were working your guitar through various pickups. It seemed like such an intense level of concentration, beyond all the nerdy playing aspects. How did you prepare for that?

MORSE I would think it was similar to what you would do with a trio. I would get Dave to come over, and we'd work without a drummer — we'd work to a click. But sometimes [*drummer*] Van [*Romaine*] would come over and we'd rehearse for a day. A lot of the stuff I do involves switching from a distorted sound to a clean sound; I'm going from my guitar volume on 10 to somewhere between three or four. It's variable. Every time I do it, it's going to be slightly different. And then I work with the short delay or long delay, maybe some chorus. Plus, I'm changing the pickups at the same time, trying to make up for the high end that's lost by turning down the guitar that's plugged into a distorted amp. Trying to manage it all is a bit difficult, but you figure out a way to connect everything.

GP You do realize, John, that you're talking to a guy who can fly a plane and practice guitar at the same time?

PETRUCCI I know. Who can do that?

MORSE Anybody could do that.

PETRUCCI Oh, sure! [*laughs*]

MORSE No, seriously. To be a good pilot is all about judgment. Writing is the same way. Art is all about judgment — the balance and looking ahead. The same is true for flying. It's all about realizing how many things you need to be on top of. You control what you can, and if you think you can't stay in control of something, you take an alternate route, so to speak.

PETRUCCI I would read about you, Steve, how you could drive and practice at the same time. It made me feel like the ultimate slacker.

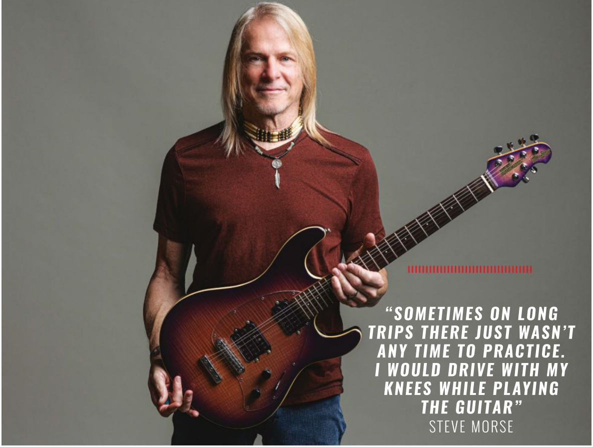
MORSE Sometimes on long trips there just wasn't any time to practice. What I would do was, I'd put this fleece pad — like one of those shoulder-belt pads — on the steering wheel, and I would drive with my knees while playing the guitar. If the road was crowded, I wouldn't do that, but if I was on an interstate and no cars were around, sure, I could manage it. It's only a few inches from the guitar neck to the steering wheel, so you can get your hands back on the wheel pretty quickly.

FINDING YOUR VOICE

GP Both of you have established your own musical identities and found success by bucking musical formulas and industry expectations. How hard was it to stick to your guns and not play it safe?

PETRUCCI It can be hard and scary sometimes. For me, it's all Steve's fault. [*Morse laughs*] No, it's true, in a way, because I was a young musician getting into rock music and playing guitar. And then I heard the Dregs and I thought, There's more to this than what other people are doing. And I include Yes and Rush in that — they followed their own paths. I decided that I wanted to play music that is more challenging and more nontraditional as far as structure, and that kind of attitude really bucks the whole system. But that's what I wanted to do. It's been an uphill battle at times, sure, but we've been fortunate to make a career out of doing a style of music that we love. We're really proud to be part of this big prog family tree that includes Steve and the Dregs.

RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES



"SOMETIMES ON LONG TRIPS THERE JUST WASN'T ANY TIME TO PRACTICE. I WOULD DRIVE WITH MY KNEES WHILE PLAYING THE GUITAR"
STEVE MORSE

For as scary and difficult as it is, it's also really rewarding. You're doing things on your own terms, and you're forging your own path. I was into the Dregs, Rush, Yes, Iron Maiden and Metallica, so when I played, it sounded like a metal version of instrumental prog music. But I never heard any music like yours before, Steve. I never heard anything that sounded like the Dregs. It was so original. How did you come up with that? I'm really curious.

MORSE That's a good question, and there's a lot in that. See, by the time you heard my music, I had played in bluegrass bands and rock bands. I'd played in many cover bands and studied classic guitar. I'd written pieces for classical guitar, and I was in a weird band that we called Dixie Grit. The name was just a joke, because none of us were really from the South. It was just a funny joke. We'd get hired for dances and the people would flip out — not in a good way. [*laughs*] People just hated it. That band eventually broke up, and then it was just [*bassist*] Andy West and me. We got another drummer and started something else. It was all like, "What can we do?"

We threw ideas around and put together a three-piece band. We played a free concert for college kids, and it went over well enough to inspire us. I noticed people could put up with a lot of variety — and not just put up with it but really enjoy it. That's something the music business doesn't encourage. The business is all about niches — radio stations play only one type of music, and they only play the hits. Record stores back then were the same way.

The whole thing made me feel alienated from the business of music, so I concentrated on what was in front of me, which was the music itself. We played a lot of free gigs early on. Because I wrote the music and didn't have to look too much at my fingers, my eyes were always on the audience. I watched them and noticed what would make them get up and walk away. What would make them stop and listen? That's when I realized it was melody and changes, getting in and out of sections and back to the melody. When we did solos, they couldn't be too long. I put a four-minute cap on the songs, and I kept writing things and imagining people listening and smiling, or maybe they'd be moving their heads and tapping their feet. This was in Miami, which was quite a cosmopolitan place at the time.

That experience really helped me feel like there was a future for what I wanted to do. I knew that it was never going to be big commercially, because I could see the popularity of the stereotypical things. But once I saw people liked the variety of music that we played, and they could see we were having a good time doing it, it gave me the push to continue.

LEADING THE BAND

GP You two have something in common in that you're

both band leaders. Did that come naturally to you?

PETRUCCI In my case, it did. There are some guitarists — amazing virtuoso players — who join somebody else's band, and they're quite happy in that role. However, I think there's a certain kind of personality that makes somebody gravitate toward the position of leading a band. Without sounding like a megalomaniac, I like to have my hand in things. I like to do the work. I have a very specific way that I think about things and how I imagine things should be presented musically and visually, and how business should be run. I've been producing the band for a while now, and I feel as if that's my comfort zone. I like being able to see things through, not only to my own satisfaction but also in a way the band can feel happy about. It's not about being a dictator in these situations. If you're a good leader, then you want to respect and use everybody's talents; you want to bring out the best in everybody. Some people don't feel comfortable in that role. Others have it thrust upon them: "Okay, nobody wants to lead the band, so I will." I welcome it.

> **"THE IDEA THAT A GUITAR CAN STILL BE IMPROVED AND BE EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT HAS BEEN A REAL REVELATION TO ME"**
> JOHN PETRUCCI

MORSE I can say that John is a natural leader, so that makes him an excellent band leader. He has a vision and he knows how to persevere. He has a patience level that I know I don't have. I kind of envy him for that. [*laughs*] When he wants to do something right, he puts his mind to it.

PETRUCCI Yeah, but I got so much of that from you!

MORSE Well, thank you, but I think you had it in you all along. Now, see, with me and the Dregs, I sort of fell into my niche and it evolved into the musical dictator. It started with Andy West and me: "What do you want to do? How about this? Oh, how about you play that?" After a while, it came back to me to decide. I was kind of like the kid in class who always had his hand up: "Pick me, pick me! I know!" Whenever it came to a musical question, the rest of the people in the band kind of sat there because I would still be talking: "Let's do this. Let's change that. And, oh, can we change that other thing?" It's just the way I am. I like to run through the possibilities. I was happy to defer to the guys on other matters. But as far as having the big picture about the music, yeah, that kind of fell on my shoulders. I never minded.

BEHIND THE GUITARS

GP You two also share a connection to Ernie Ball Music Man: You've both designed signature guitars with the company.

PETRUCCI Steve, you were first with that.

MORSE Yeah, what happened was, Sterling Ball asked me about doing a guitar. I had an experience with another company that kind of soured me. Whenever I would present an idea, they would say, "You can't do that," so that was a real turn-off. But Sterling said, "There's only one rule: We won't stop until you're happy." I said, "I can live with that." So we went to it. We did some prototypes, and very soon after I was playing them all the time. I put my Tele Strat down. [*Morse's main guitar with the Dregs was a Frankenstein made from a Telecaster body, a Stratocaster neck and a complex array of electronics.*] The guitar I designed with Ernie Ball Music Man turned out to be all the guitar I ever needed. I've still got serial number one. When John came along, things went to warp speed with what they could do in terms of design.

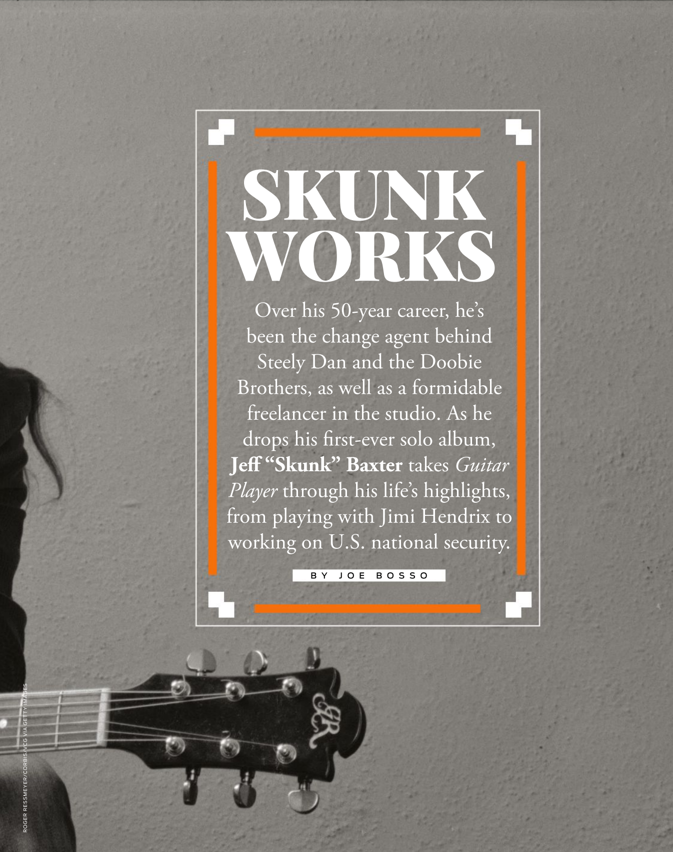
PETRUCCI For me, the relationship with Ernie Ball Music Man came about in a serendipitous way. I had been using another brand, but my manager, Frank Solomon, called me up and told me what they were doing with Sterling Ball. I was playing another guitar, but I did use Ernie Ball volume pedals, and I loved those. A friend of mine who was teching for me at the time said, "Man, you've got to play a real guitar. You've got to play Music Mans." Frank set up a call with me and Sterling, and we hit it off. Of course, having my favorite guitar player of all time as an Ernie Ball Music Man endorser sealed the deal. I thought, "If it works for Steve Morse, it'll work for me."

Sterling said the same thing to me: "We're not going to stop until it's right. We make tools for artists." I just celebrated 20 years with Ernie Ball Music Man. It's been such a great experience. Beyond building guitars, there's a family there. I'm proud to play these guitars and be a part of the family. Working with them, I really got into design. It opened me up to so many ideas: "Why can't this be over here? Why does this have to be so hard to reach?" The idea that a guitar can still be improved and it can be exactly what you want has been a real revelation to me.

MORSE That's the way John's mind works: "Why can't this be better? How can we make this thing better?" For most people, good enough is the end of everything. For John, it's a starting point. The way he designs these amazing guitars from start to finish takes an incredible level of commitment and discipline.

PETRUCCI You're the same way. You've always been an inspiration in that you're a problem solver.

MORSE I just don't know any other way to go about things. It drives some people crazy, but I always try to bring them around to my side.



SKUNK WORKS

Over his 50-year career, he's been the change agent behind Steely Dan and the Doobie Brothers, as well as a formidable freelancer in the studio. As he drops his first-ever solo album, **Jeff "Skunk" Baxter** takes *Guitar Player* through his life's highlights, from playing with Jimi Hendrix to working on U.S. national security.

BY JOE BOSSO

ROGER RESSMEYER/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

OPENING PAGE: Jeff “Skunk” Baxter, photographed February 7, 1979.

THROUGHOUT Jeff “Skunk” Baxter’s storied career, various theories — some fairly tame, others pretty outrageous — have been floated as to the etymology of his famous nickname. In the annals of juicy rock and roll secrets, this one is a biggie. When asked if he would choose the occasion of this *Guitar Player* interview to make some news, the guitarist lets out a good-natured laugh. “Not a chance,” he says. “A girl’s gotta have some secrets, right?

“There seems to be a lot of interest in this little tidbit,” he adds after some reflection. “And all I can say is, the answer will be revealed one day in my book. Not before.”

Whenever that book arrives, it will no doubt feature an extensive index to list even a portion of the albums and songs Baxter has played on since he began his professional career in 1969. His spunky, melodic and highly sophisticated approach to soloing — rocky enough for rockers, jazzy enough for jazzers — quickly made him one of the most in-demand, first-call studio guitarists during the glory days of the 1970s West Coast singer-songwriter period. Over the years, he’s performed on hundreds of records for a glittering array of music’s elite, including Barbra Streisand, Dolly Parton, Donna Summer, Joe Cocker, Rod Stewart, Carly Simon, Hoyt Axton, Bryan Adams, Ringo Starr, Glen Campbell, Joni Mitchell and Rick Nelson, to name a few.

“I’M PRIVILEGED TO BE ABLE TO HAVE THE RESPECT OF MY PEERS. BUT THE SUCCESS I’VE HAD CAME ABOUT BECAUSE I APPLIED MYSELF”

Making Baxter’s accomplishments even more remarkable is his membership in not one but two legendary bands. As a cofounder of Steely Dan, he appeared on the group’s iconic first three albums — *Can’t Buy a Thrill*, *Countdown to Ecstasy* and *Pretzel Logic* — and performed sumptuous solos on numerous tracks, most notably “Rikki Don’t Lose That Number,” “Bodhisattva” and “My Old School.” He followed up that stint with a five-year run in the Doobie Brothers, which saw the group transform from rowdy rockers into multi-Platinum, blue-eyed soul monsters. Baxter contributed standout moments that includes his searing solo in the Motown cover “Take Me in Your Arms (Rock Me a Little While),” a star turn in which he constructs a perfectly formed mini composition that builds to a thrilling climax.

“Quite honestly, I never imagined that I would have had this kind of success,” Baxter says. “All I ever wanted was to play the guitar in a band and have fun. I didn’t know that it would lead to being a studio musician and everything else that has come my way. Whatever expectations I had at a young age were certainly met, and as my playing matured, and I matured, so too did the opportunities.” He pauses, then adds, “I think it’s important to recognize your accomplishments, but it’s more important to move forward. I’m privileged to be able to have the respect of my peers, but the success I’ve had came about because I applied myself. If I didn’t try my hardest, none of this would have happened.”

Self-taught as both a guitarist and guitar repairman (and later, as a designer and consultant for the Roland Corporation), Baxter established yet another career for himself in the early ’90s as a U.S. national security expert, once again under his own tutelage. After reading various aviation publications, he wrote a paper suggesting that the U.S. military’s ship-based Aegis anti-aircraft system could be reconfigured as a missile-defense solution. He gave the paper to former California Republican congressman Dana Rohrabacher, and in short order he became a defense consultant.

Over the years, Baxter has worked for the Department of Defense, chaired congressional advisory boards and done work for private defense innovators, such as Northrop Grumman. Asked if he can draw any parallels between guitar playing and working as a military consultant, Baxter says, “Sure. Whether it’s a guitar or a missile-defense system, there’s always a way to make it work better. I always say, ‘A radar is just an electric guitar on steroids.’ If you understand the physics, then you can grasp the plethora of concepts that have to do with frequency, transducing, broadcasting, electronics…all that stuff. Being a guitar player, I’m a techno geek anyway, so this kind of thing comes naturally to me.”

Between playing in superstar bands (he was inducted with the Doobie Brothers into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2020), fielding recording session offers and working as a military defense analyst, Baxter squeezed in time to produce albums for Carl Wilson and Nils Lofgren, as well as for acts like Nazareth, the Ventures, the Stray Cats, and Billy and the Beaters. It seems as if the one thing he never got around to was cutting his own solo album. He certainly thought about it, but it always seemed like something he would do down the road. “My standard line was always, ‘I’ll get to it someday,’” he says.

That day is finally at hand, with the release of *Speed of Heat* (BMG/Renew Records), a dazzling mix of covers and originals that Baxter co-wrote with his keyboardist and producing partner, CJ Vanston. “I met CJ years ago at a jingle session in Chicago,” he explains. “It was one of those moments when I had

Baxter today in a promotional photo for his new album, *Speed of Heat.*

With Steely Dan in 1972: (from left) Jim Hodder, David Palmer, Denny Dias, Donald Fagen, Baxter and Walter Becker

this incredible, nonverbal communication with another musician. We just clicked, and I said to him, ‘If I ever do a solo album, I’m doing it with you.’ ”

Originally, Baxter envisioned a record of instrumentals, and indeed, there are sublime examples, such as a loving rendition of “Apache” (made famous by the Shadows and guitarist Jørgen Ingmann) that brims with stinging and singing guitar lines, as well as a soaring and sensual version of “The Rose” (known to music fans from Bette Midler’s multi-Platinum-selling original for the film of the same name) that takes flight with Baxter’s lyrical pedal-steel playing. Other instrumental highlights include the turbo-charged rocking title track, an exquisite ballad titled “Juliet” that features an aching nylon-string acoustic interlude, and a spacey, almost cosmic R&B remake of Steely Dan’s “Do It Again,” on which he layers offbeat, jazz-tinged leads.

Over time, the album grew to include vocal tunes, and one of the most startling cuts on *Speed of Heat* is yet another trip through Baxter’s Steely Dan past: a raucous rock reinvention of “My Old School” that sees the guitarist turn in a rare and robust singing performance. His onetime Doobie Brothers bandmate Michael McDonald is in top form on the gripping ballad “A Place in the Sun,” and country superstar Clint Black shows off his pop sensibilities on the hook-filled winner “Bad Move,” which features a blazing guitar-and organ throwdown between Baxter and Vanston. And on the blues-soaked “I Can Do Without,” Baxter and guitar star Jonny Lang (here singing in a sinuous falsetto) engage in epic call-and-response leads.

“The record was such a joy to make,” Baxter says. “CJ and I have such an affinity for composing and playing together, and we were blessed to have such amazing and talented artists join in. The great thing was, they would come to me and say, ‘Hey, I heard you’re doing a solo album. Can I be on it?’ Which was great, but the thing we put to everybody was, ‘If you’re going to be on the record, you’re going to write with CJ and myself, and we want you to do something you’ve never done before. We wanted to go on a new journey with everybody. And I think we got there.”

> **“WE HAD A THING IN STEELY DAN CALLED ‘GOTTA HAVE IT.’ IF YOU DID SOMETHING YOU REALLY WANTED, YOU WOULD SAY, ‘GOTTA HAVE IT’ ”**

You started playing the guitar at age nine. I understand that Howard Roberts was one of your first influences.

Absolutely. Even at a young age, I was struck by his sense of melody. Each solo he played was its own composition. The same is true for Wes Montgomery. Whether he was doing it on the fly or not, it had a structure to it. And, of course, I loved the Ventures because they played the melody of a great song. That hit me as a young kid, and it stuck with me.

What kind of guitar were you playing as a kid?

I started out with a $16 Mexican guitar that my dad bought for me, and then I borrowed a number of guitars from different friends. Because of my father’s job in advertising, I grew up in Mexico City, where electric guitars were extremely expensive. But I was lucky enough to have friends who had guitars, so there was stuff around to play. The first guitar that I ever bought was a Fender Jazzmaster, based on the advice I got from [*the Ventures’*] Bob Bogle after I’d written him a fan letter.

As a young teenager, you played in bands in Mexico City. How developed were your abilities on the instrument at the time?

Well, I’m still not fully formed, and I sure wasn’t then. But I had a lot of energy. I knew four or five chords, and I was a fairly aggressive player, which was adequate for what we were doing. Everybody was just starting out, really. Even the best rock and roll bands, the most famous ones, were basically three- and four-chord bands.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Rehearsing with the Doobie Brothers in 1979. (from left) Baxter, Keith Knudsen, Patrick Simmons and Tiran Porter

ROGER RESSMEYER/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Were your parents cool with you playing in bands as a young kid?
My mom wasn't thrilled. My dad wasn't too sure about it, but he was always very supportive.

Just a few years later, you wound up working at music stores in Manhattan. How did that happen?
My father sent me to prep school in Connecticut to further my education. Because Connecticut is a long way from Mexico City, there were occasions where, instead of flying back home for Christmas or Easter vacations, I would just stay with friends in New York. That's when I started to work at some of the music stores on 48th Street, which was the mecca for buying musical instruments. I was about 13 or 14 at the time.

I started repairing guitars, which I'd already been doing in Mexico because there was no one else to do it. I was working at Jimmy's Music Shop, but there wasn't a ton of repair work coming out of there. One day, Dan Armstrong approached me and said, "I'll pay you $5 an hour to come and work with me" — which was a lot more than I'd been making. I went to work for Danny, and that's when I really got to hone my skills, especially in terms of electronics, and I got to meet every great guitar player, because they all came to Dan Armstrong's shop.

Tell me how you came to meet Jimmy James, whom we all know as Jimi Hendrix. You actually played a gig with him, right?
This was at Jimmy's Music Shop. A gentleman came in with a beat-up Fender Duo-Sonic. He wanted to upgrade the instrument or get a nicer guitar. I had already customized a Fender Stratocaster for a left-handed player who wanted to play righty; I made some changes to the vibrato arm and a few other small things. But the guy never showed up, so I just traded Jimmy James the Strat for the Duo-Sonic. I got in trouble with Frank, one of my bosses. He said, "What the hell was that?" I said, "Well, he seemed like a nice guy." And for that, I was docked two weeks' pay.

One day after that, Jimmy James came back to the store and invited me to come down to a club to see him play. One night his bass player was late, so I got a chance to play a couple of tunes with him. We became friends — not deep, deep friends, but friends enough. We had some interesting conversations from then on. He was very kind and complimented my playing. Of course I loved his playing. I was just such a fan of Curtis Mayfield and Little Beaver [*Willie Hale*], and I could see how they influenced him. We had that in common.

"THAT'S THE SECRET OF GOOD TONE. IT'S NOT JUST THE FUNDAMENTAL; IT'S EVERYTHING CLINGING TO IT HARMONICALLY"

It's such a rear-view mirror question, but did you have any sense that Jimi was destined for greatness just a few years later?
No. But when Chas Chandler came into the club to listen to him play, I did see the kind of audience Jimi had and response he got. You knew there was something there. Randy California was in the band, and he was a friend as well. We both agreed that this guy was going somewhere, but we couldn't tell where. All you had to do was look at people's faces as they listened to the music. There was certainly the suggestion that this wasn't a mere club band.

A few years later, you moved to California. Was it your idea to pursue the session scene?
I came out to audition as a pedal-steel player for the Flying Burrito Brothers. At the same time I found a job at Valley Sound, which was a place that repaired guitars and amplifiers. They hired me right away because they were looking for a guitar repair guy. I started repairing guitars for a number of the players in Los Angeles, and that's how I got introduced to the studio scene. Being in L.A. at the time was like a rocket boost. I met all the great players. I didn't end up playing with the Flying Burrito Brothers, but I did play steel for Linda Ronstadt and did occasional gigs in the house band at the Palomino Club. Pretty soon we put Steely Dan together.

In the studio in 1979 with his Roland GS-500 synth controller.

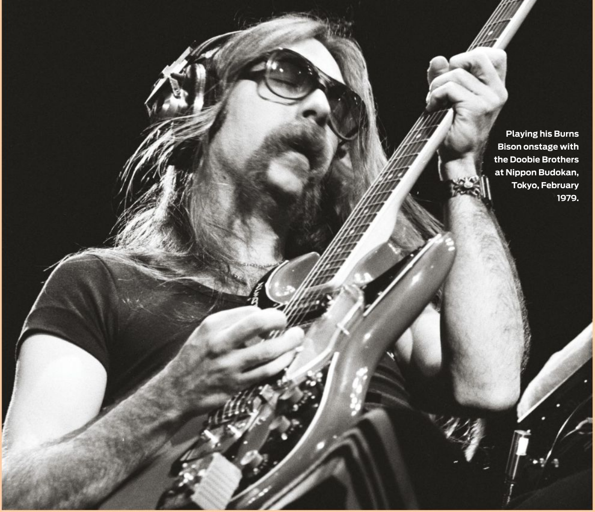
ROGER RESSMEYER/CORBIS/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

When Steely Dan formed, was your guitar role clearly defined from the start?
Not so much, but I do think they wanted me to bring my experience and skills and particular approach to the game. I had met Walter Becker and Donald Fagen on the East Coast through [*ABC/Dunhill Records staff producer*] Gary Katz, who was producing this band called Bead Game. I was doing sessions in New York and Boston at the time. Gary said, "Would you be willing to work on a project that I'm doing with two songwriters, Walter Becker and Donald Fagen, and a singer named Linda Hoover?" I said, "Yeah, sure. It's a session — I'll do it." After the first session, Becker and Fagen said, "Wow, we've never heard anybody play guitar like that on our music." And I said, "Well, I've never heard music like this. I really like it." We all agreed that we wanted to find an opportunity to put a band together.

Becker and Fagen moved out to Los Angeles to become staff songwriters at ABC/Dunhill Records. Me and a few other guys — David Palmer, who was a singer I knew from New York, and Jimmy Hodder, who was the drummer for Bead Game, and their friend Danny Diaz on guitar — put together a band based on the songwriting opportunities that Becker and Fagen had at ABC/Dunhill. We were rehearsing in Jay Lasker's office — he was the president of the record company — and one day Jay came in and went, "What the hell is this?" Gary Katz said, "Well, we have this band..." Jay said, "Okay, let me hear it." We played for him, and he signed us.

Did the band start out fairly democratic?
In the beginning, it was somewhat democratic, because I think Becker and Fagen relied a fair amount on the expertise and capabilities of the other musicians in the band. As we began to progress, and obviously as the band became more successful, Becker and Fagen wanted to take more and more creative control. I had the attitude of a studio guy, so I never really felt insulted or anything. After a while, though, they didn't want to tour, and I really enjoyed playing live. By that time I was already playing with the Doobie Brothers, as well.

You played some brilliant solos on Steely Dan tunes, particularly "Rikki Don't Lose That Number" and "My Old School." Becker and Fagen had a reputation for



Playing his Burns Bison onstage with the Doobie Brothers at Nippon Budokan, Tokyo, February 1979.

KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

AXES POWER

SKUNK REVEALS THE STAR GUITARS BEHIND *SPEED OF HEAT*.

JEFF BAXTER HAS been known to play a range of different guitars over his career. Among the more unlikely models he's wielded is a Burns Bison that he purchased "for 25 bucks and a six-pack of Bud," he tells *Guitar Player*. As it turns out, that very guitar made an appearance when Baxter performed on disco queen Donna Summer's Giorgio Moroder–produced 1979 album, *Bad Girls*, including his solo on the hit single "Hot Stuff."

"I didn't really want to do the same old stuff," Baxter explains, "so when Giorgio said that I could play whatever I wanted, I said that was fine with me. I showed up with my Burns Bison. I heard the track, went in and played the solo. I came out and said, 'What do you think?' Giorgio said, 'It's exactly what we want. We want to move Donna away from just pure disco and give it a rock feel.' From what I've read, that's the impression the majority of people got from mating that kind of guitar playing to her tracks."

As you might expect, Baxter had plenty of guitars to choose from when tracking his new album, *Speed of Heat*. "There's a few," he offers. "Probably the star guitar was a Roland-Ready Strat — it's a Mexican Strat that I had ripped apart and refretted. I put some Skunk-o-Sonic pickups in it [*see main feature*] and have used that guitar pretty much throughout the project."

Both lap and pedal-steel guitars make appearances, notably on the tracks "Bad Move" and "The Rose," respectively. "On 'Bad Move,' there's a Peavey Electronics lap steel that Hartley [*Peavey*] gave me," Baxter reveals. "The pedal steel is a Sho-Bud Super Pro that was custom made for me. I've had it since the late '70s, and it's sensational."

Other guitars used include classical, acoustic and a 12-string baritone. "Henry at Manny's gave me an Ovation years ago — he literally took it off the wall and gave it to me," Baxter says. "That's on the record. The other acoustics are Bedell, and they're the finest acoustic guitars in the world, bar none. I also used a baritone guitar on it — a Veillette-Citron 12-string. There's some different instruments, but the core instrument was definitely that Roland-Ready Strat. It's a guitar that offers me endless possibilities."

Onstage with (from left) Orianthi, Slash and Richie Sambora at the NAMM Tec Awards at the Anaheim Hilton, January 24, 2015

JESSE GRANT/GETTY IMAGES FOR NAMM

putting musicians through their paces. Did they direct you, or could you play what you wanted?

Most of the time, I could play what I wanted. As far as those two solos were concerned, it was pretty much that way because there was no real idea in their heads of what they wanted. The “My Old School” thing was basically, “Take your best shot.” Much of that was a first take. We had a thing in the band called “gotta have it,” which meant that, even though Walter and Donald were certainly in the driver’s seat, if you did something that you really wanted, then you would say, “Gotta have it.” The solo in “My Old School” was a “gotta have it.”

What kinds of guitars were you playing during this period?

I had a Telecaster I had rescued from a dumpster out at Fender — the body anyway. The solution I used to strip the paint from the guitar was so industrial strength that it actually delaminated it, so I had to use some gaffer’s tape to put the guitar together. I installed a pair of Skunk-o-Sonic pickups that I had designed. That was one instrument that I used. The other was a Stratocaster I had built myself out of curly maple. Actually, the guitar I used on “My Old School,” a Stratocaster, I routed it out in the parking lot at Valley Sound the day before the session. I just assembled it, wired it up, plugged it in, and there it was.

> “I CONSIDER MYSELF A CHANGE AGENT. THAT’S CERTAINLY WHAT MY DAY JOB CONSIDERS ME — SOMEONE WHO APPROACHES THINGS FROM A NON-TRADITIONAL POINT OF VIEW”

What is the secret to Skunk-o-Sonic pickups?

Well, let’s see… I wind them on my mom’s sewing machine, which is the only thing that ever had a variable speed and a spindle that I could wind on. And I use a special gauge of wire that works for me. The magnets are pretty standard, but it’s important to use the heavy-gauge guitar strings. You have to understand, a pickup is basically a current generator. The more you can stimulate the magnetic field, the more tonality and harmonic resonance you can get out of it. That’s really the secret of good tone. It’s not just the fundamental; it’s everything that’s clinging to it harmonically,

When you joined the Doobie Brothers, you were paired with their guitarist Patrick Simmons. Did you develop a good relationship as players?

Oh, yeah, it was excellent. I think we had very complementary styles, and my style of guitar playing — having had a lot of experience in the studio and being sort of eclectic — complemented both his playing and his sense of composition. Patrick and I worked well together. We became friends and loved playing together.

The musical direction of the band changed radically once Michael McDonald joined in 1975. You guys went from being kind of a rough-and-ready biker-rock outfit to doing more R&B pop. You were the one who actually brought Michael in, right?

That’s true. I had been in the band for about a year, maybe more. Tom Johnston, who was one of the lead singers, was having some severe health problems at the point. We did a gig at Louisiana State University, I think, and he couldn’t come out onstage. I went out and said to the audience, “We can either give you your money back, or if you come back in 10 days, we’ll put on a great show for you.” Nobody turned in their tickets. Then I called Michael McDonald — I knew him from playing with us in Steely Dan — and I said, “I’m sending you a one-way ticket. You want to join the Doobie Brothers?” And Michael, to his credit, said, “Sure,” and flew out. We rehearsed eight hours a day for about eight days. Then we went out to play and got five encores. I thought, I made the right decision. Now, where do we go from here?

Michael contributed keyboard playing, but he began to compose as well — and did a hell of a job. There was no real telling where the band was going. One thing I did want to create was the opportunity for the band to develop as players. Tiran Porter is probably one of the most underrated bass players on the planet. That guy is ferocious. I mean, talk about melodic. And Pat Simmons is a great guitar player — nobody does it better. Keith Knudsen is a great drummer and a tremendous human being. For my part, I wanted people to get in a particular head space, to move into an area where the approach to music was a little tighter, a little bit more in the Steely Dan genre.

I remember when we were doing the [*1977*] *Living on the Fault Line* album — which I think is the best album the Doobies ever did — and Keith came up to me and said, "I dropped a snare drum beat in bar 51." And I thought, Bingo! We're here. Everybody's got the mindset. Not the Steely Dan mindset, but the mindset of looking at your playing from a little more of a disciplined perspective. I started booking the Doobie Brothers as a rhythm section for Hoyt Axton and Leo Sayer. I said, "Let's start doing sessions."

You left the band right after [*1978's*] *Minute by Minute* became a ginormous smash. A lot of guitar players would have said, "Are you crazy?" Did you have any reservations about leaving when you guys had reached this incredible pinnacle?
You've got to know when it's time to go. With success comes different perspectives from different members of the band. I kind of could see where this was going, and I felt that it was the right time. I talked to a couple of friends whose advice I trusted. I talked to my dad, and he said, "Now's the time. Go when you're at the top." It was the right decision, because with that kind of wind at my back, it opened up tremendous opportunities. I really wanted to start producing records, and those doors opened very quickly. I was already a session player. Steve Lukather and I both joked that we were the only first-call session guitar players who were in famous bands.

So your decision to leave wasn't because you were unhappy with the musical direction. Your attitude was more like, "My work here is done."
Well, yes. I consider myself a change agent. That's certainly what my day job considers me — someone who approaches things from a non-traditional point of view. If you're a change agent, part of your personality is understanding that there is a time after the change that you go on to do something else.

Between sessions and production work, you carved out a career for yourself as a national security consultant. I assume in the pantheon of guitar players, you're unique in this regard.
Actually, no — there's Paul Reed Smith. Paul came to me some years ago and said, "I have an idea for an underwater acoustic detection system. Let me show it to you." I took a look at it and said, "This is a cool idea." I called Rear Admiral Nevin Carr over at the Office of Naval Research and asked him to check it out. He met with Paul, and now Paul has a company called Digital Harmonic that does a tremendous amount of work with the U.S. government.

When I wrote my first paper on adapting a particular naval-fleet defense system that was designed to protect, to defend against air-breathing threats — aircraft and cruise missiles — I was very familiar with the radar in that system. Having read a couple of articles from some publications, I wrote a paper on how to convert that system to do missile defense. And that's kind of how it all got started.

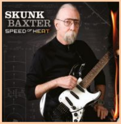
A lot of people in government are musicians. I saw a video of you recently playing in a band with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.
Sure. He's a pretty good guitar player and an energetic and ballsy singer. We have a band called the Coalition of the Willing. One of the guitar players is a former ambassador from Hungary. The other guitar player is the former Deputy Undersecretary for Department of Energy. The drummer was a former ambassador for Japan. The bass player was the former Undersecretary of State for Military Affairs. It's that kind of deal.

When you guys get together, do you mainly talk military matters or music?
Both. I do still do a lot of work for the Department of Energy. I did some work for the State Department, and certainly there was all kinds of tangential stuff. Mostly what we do is charity work, raising money for vets and certain charities. After you sweat out a version of "Hoochie Coochie Man," you sit down with different folks and you always have those discussions, especially during rehearsal.

Performing at the Troubadour in West Hollywood, May 3, 2010

AMERICAN EMBASSY
ROME, ITALY
Jeff Baxter

KOH HASEBE/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES



'HEAT' EXCHANGE

SKUNK SHARES INSIGHTS TO KEY TRACKS ON *SPEED OF HEAT*.

The solo performer today. "One of the things you learn from doing so much studio work is, you don't stomp all over everybody's playing. That's etiquette."

***Speed of Heat* features a beautiful version of "Apache."**
Oh, thank you. Of course, I was familiar with both the Jørgen Ingmann version and the Shadows' version — Hank Marvin and the Shadows. I always loved the song, and similar to "My Old School," I always thought there was a seed of power lurking in that composition. I thought, Okay, I'm going to have a try at seeing if I can inject some horsepower into this. And we definitely did. It's lyrical and majestic — cinematic. That was kind of the idea because Apache refers to a very noble and majestic race of people. In my own way, I was trying to translate that.

In your version of "The Rose," you play pedal steel, but you don't use it as a flavor; rather, you perform the vocal line on the instrument.
That's correct. First of all, I love the instrument. It has a sound and a voice that, to me, is very special and unique. Some years ago, I was on the board of advisors for *Guitar Player*, and I was also writing a monthly column. For the 25th anniversary of the magazine, I was asked to do a tribute to guitar players that had passed on. I agreed, and I thought about it… and thought about it… Then I heard "The Rose," and I thought, This is a beautiful song. There's something about this, even without the lyric, that is just special. My contribution was to go up onstage and play an acapella version of the song.

I got almost through the first verse when Adrian Belew came out, plugged in and started playing with me. He's a friend, and I love his playing. By the time we got to the end of the second verse, we had a whole band — everybody had come out and played, and it was beautiful. I thought about it later on when making the album. As a matter of fact, I've got a note here to call Adrian and thank him for helping inspire me. It just made perfect sense to keep the *a capella* part to showcase the voice of the pedal steel and demonstrate its beauty.

CJ wrote a beautiful arrangement of the tune, but as we were working on it, I thought, How do we turn the song into something that leaves people with a memory? I started to think about my father, who I love very much. In the same way as when I had originally performed the song at the *Guitar Player* anniversary, in memory of great players that had passed, I did it in memory to another great man who passed — my father. All during the performance of it in the studio, that was on my mind. That was the motivator.

You do radically different new takes on two Steely Dan tunes from your past. With "Do It Again," you turn it into more of an R&B groover.
Yeah, it's a shuffle. I love the whole vibe of shuffles. I always thought it could go in another direction. A great song is a great song, so you can rework it. Don't get me wrong: I have great respect for the original, but when CJ and I started looking at what we could do with the song, we felt like another groove was in order.

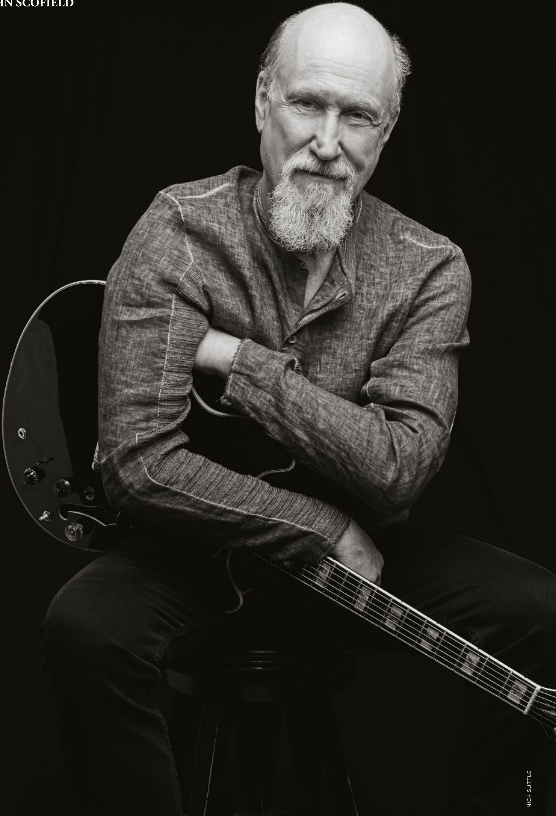
And you rocked up "My Old School" a great deal.
I always thought the song could rock. It's an idea I had for a while, really — I wanted to put some muscle in it. Some songs are sacrosanct, I guess, but not many. There's always a new way to approach a song.

I guess it wasn't a stretch for you to sing it, as you had done so onstage with Steely Dan.
It wasn't, but in point of fact, I did a scratch vocal and sent it off to Steven Tyler, because I really wanted him to do it. He listened to the track and said, "Who's singing it? It sounds pretty cool." I told him it was me and that it was just a scratch, and he said, "What's the matter with you? Why don't you sing it?" I told him, "But I'm not a singer," and said, "Yeah, you are." So I said, "Well, you know more about this stuff than I do, so I trust your judgment. I'll take a shot at it." I think it worked out pretty well.

I love the nylon-string solo you do on the cut "Juliet." But it's hard for me to tell just by listening to it — are you fingerpicking that?
Yep, that's fingerpicking — I've got sharp nails. That song came about one day when CJ and I set up to start working. Usually, we start out with a tempo on the drum machine just to see where it will take us. This one day, CJ walked away to do something and the drum machine was going, and that's when I just came up with the opening riff. He came back and said, "Wow, what's that?" And just like that, we wrote the song on the fly. I love it when that happens. Another ballad on the record, "Giselle," appeared out of nowhere in the same sort of way.

You and Jonny Lang trade knockout solos on "I Can Do Without." How much planning went into what you two would play?
[*laughs*] As far as I know, we spent zero time worrying about who's playing what. The idea of trading solos was something we wanted to do from the beginning. As soon as we had the track down, it just unfolded. It was almost too easy. Jonny is a very tasteful player. He's a guitarist who has a good amount of studio experience, and with that he's developed a sense of etiquette. One of the things you learn from doing so much studio work is, you don't stomp all over everybody's playing; you kind of wait and see what everybody else is doing and add what you think is right. That's etiquette. Jonny and I both understand how it works.

The album's title track is full of hair-raising soloing, but you never lose the framework of the song and melody. There's a meaning behind each solo.
Sure. That goes back to my first influences, the players who instilled a sense of melody and composition in me. There is a theme that we repeat — it's not a fugue — but I did try to keep it moving and introduce new elements. That was a fun song to play. I did a whole take, but then I found a couple of sections where I comped it. After that, I wanted to learn the whole thing and play it all the way through again, 'cause I think that's important.



NICK SUTTLE

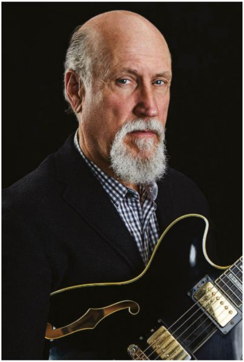
SCO IT ALONE

More than 40 albums into his musically varied career, **John Scofield** makes something he hasn't made before: a solo record.

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

IN AN INCREDIBLE career that spans nearly 50 years, John Scofield long ago established himself as one of the Big Three of modern jazz guitar, along with his colleagues Pat Metheny and Bill Frisell. But unlike those players and many others, he had never made a solo record. As Scofield tells *Guitar Player*, "That's not what I do."

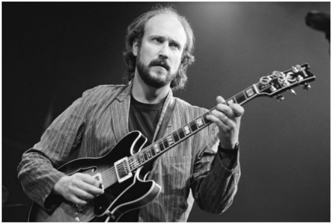
Instead, over more than 40 albums as a band leader, Scofield has led a number of lineups through a career marked by many unpredictable changes. He played advanced post-bop jazz from the late '70s to the early '80s, explored funk during his mid-to-late 1980s Gramavision years (a period that overlapped with his high-exposure tenure with Miles Davis), and trod jazzier terrain during his time with Blue Note, from 1990 to 1995. There followed a stint with Verve that saw him stretch out in a number of new directions, including acoustic guitar with horn section (1996's *Quiet*), an ultra-funky organ-fueled encounter with jam-band godfathers Medeski, Martin Wood (1998's *A Go Go*), alternative rock-funk (2000's *Bump*) and jazz (2001's *Works for Me* with bassist Christian McBride, pianist Brad Mehldau, alto saxophonist Kenny Garrett and legendary drummer Billy Higgins).



The mercurial guitarist subsequently took his music into edgy rock-funk drum ’n’ bass territory on 2002’s *Überjam*, which found him experimenting with wild backward guitar effects on the title track and the aptly named “Acidhead.” The years since have seen him return to a more straight-ahead setting (2004’s *EnRoute*), explore earthy funk again with a crew of real-deal funkateers that includes saxophonist David “Fathead” Newman, drummer Steve Jordan and vocalists Aaron Neville and Dr. John (2005’s *That’s What I Say: John Scofield Plays the Music of Ray Charles*), and make a knees-deep excursion into New Orleans music (2009’s *Piety Street*). He debuted on Decca in 2011 with the gentle ballads album *A Moment’s Peace*, interpreted country tunes on 2016’s soulful *Country for Old Men*, and explored the music of Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Jimi Hendrix and the Band on 2017’s *Hudson*.

> “I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT GOING INTO A STUDIO AND PUTTING A SOLO ALBUM TOGETHER. THERE WERE ALWAYS TOO MANY GOOD BAND THINGS I WANTED TO DO”

Now, after all of those band settings and styles, Scofield has pared it down to just himself, his trusty Ibanez AS-200 guitar and a Boomerang Looper on his second ECM album, the unaccompanied *John Scofield*. Recorded at his home in the Hudson Valley during the pandemic, this intimate solo album finds the 70-year-old six-string icon digging into his own past as he addresses the jazz standards, rock and roll, funk and country tunes he grew up with, along with a healthy dose of the blues, all delivered with typical grace and that omnipresent vocal string-bending quality that has always been a key part of his guitar vocabulary since he began working professionally 50 years ago.



John Scofield onstage at the BIM Huis, in Amsterdam, October 23, 1988

FRANS SCHELLEKENS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Guitar Player spoke to Scofield by phone on the eve of him hitting the road to perform duets with his old friend, bassist-composer Dave Holland.

You’ve been such a band guy all your life. Where did the idea of this solo album come from?

I did a few short tours of Europe prior to the pandemic. I had never done that in New York, though I did some college gigs around Boston. Initially, I was thinking about it more just to do gigs. I hadn’t really thought I wanted to do a solo album because the idea of going into a studio and playing all by myself and having to get it done in studio time and having that pressure just wasn’t appealing.

At first, I was nervous playing these solo gigs. I’ve done a few over the years, even pre-looper. And those were fucking awful. I was lonely on the road, and just the idea of playing guitar by myself seemed weird to me, so I didn’t want to do it again. But then when I got into the looper, which was many years ago, it changed my attitude entirely. I’ve had fun with that at home. And then a couple of years before COVID, the opportunity came up to do solo gigs, and I started to really get into it and enjoy it. But as I said, I never really thought about going into a studio and putting a solo album together. There were always too many good band things that I wanted to do. But during COVID it was the only option. So I did it.

And you recorded this new album at home?

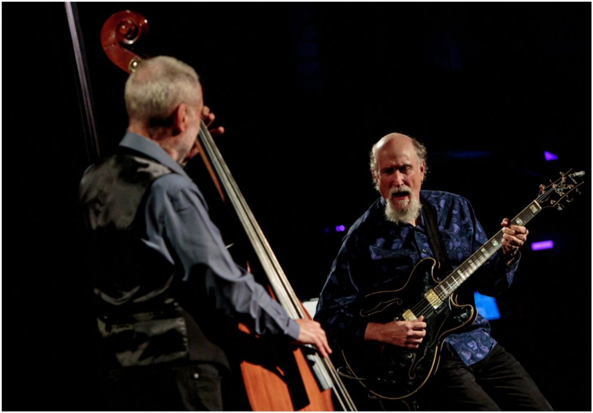
Yeah. I bought some equipment that made it possible. You know, it's easy to do now, and the way I did it was with the Universal Audio OX [*Amp Top Box*]. You plug your guitar into the amp — I used my Fender Deluxe Reverb — and the amp goes to the OX, which goes into your interface, which goes into your computer. I just recorded the whole album on GarageBand, believe it or not. But then I gave it to a very good engineer, Tyler McDermott, who tweaked it. And finally, [*ECM Records founder and producer*] Manfred Eicher went into the studio with it too. So those guys made it sound better. But I really am the worst at any kind of technical shit, so this was really stupid proof. I mainly got the OX because it's also an attenuator, so I could practice at home with my amp without being too loud and still get a little bit of a fat sound.

Get some crunch without the extreme volume.
Exactly. And then I thought it would be valuable on gigs too, where my amp is always louder than a jazz rhythm section, because I'm trying to get it to sound good. So I bought the OX and it ended up making it possible to record this solo record at home. One thing led to another. But I would never have done if it weren't for the pandemic, I don't think. I wouldn't have done it at home, and I wouldn't have taken the time to get the equipment together.

Although for years you've been doing those extended solo intros to tunes on the gig. [*The earliest example of Scofield recording in an unaccompanied solo setting comes on "Melinda," an Alan Jay Lerner standard from 1981's* Out Like a Light.]
Yeah, sure, I have been. That's the thing with solo guitar: It really works great in a rubato setting. But it's difficult to get hot and play with some rhythm, which you can do on solo piano because you have the two hands and you can comp with your left hand. But it's difficult on guitar, and you have to jump through all kinds of hoops to do it. And I just don't have that ability like a Joe Pass does. But once the looper came in, it allowed me to do that. But yeah, I could've made a record of rubato guitar, which is just not that thrilling to me.

TOP: With Miles Davis performing "Aura," in Copenhagen, December 14, 1984. ABOVE: With Charlie Haden at the Knitting Factory, June 8, 1999

JAN PERSSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (1984); HIROYUKI ITO/GETTY IMAGES (1999)



Onstage with Dave Holland at the Blue Note, Milan, November 2, 2021

SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

What were some early examples of looping that you remember?
Well, of course, Bill Frisell was the first. He had that [*Electro-Harmonix*] 16 Second [*Digital*] Delay pedal. The looper that I have is the Boomerang Phrase Sampler +, which is one of the early Boomerang things. And it doesn't remember any loops, so you have to make it on the fly and then work it. I didn't want to be like the busker who's down in front of the shopping center playing "Stairway to Heaven" with an entire track behind him. No, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to make it a little more organic than that. So I've got all kinds of ways of covering up that I'm making a loop. I try to make the loop sound good for the 30 seconds that I'm making it before I start playing over it, rather than stacking the whole thing.

So the loops do not decay?
No, they don't decay, but I can't store loops. I make one loop, and if I want to make another one, the previous loop that I made goes away. So it doesn't give me the option of playing a gig with 10 presets of the 10 songs I'm going to play on loops.

> "VIBRATO AND BENDING… YOU GOTTA DO IT FOR SOUL. THAT'S PART OF OUR AMERICAN TRADITION!"

So, for instance, how did you do that swinging tune "Elder Dance," which sounds like Bucky Pizzarelli comping for Barney Kessel?
On that, I made a 12-bar blues loop that just swung, then I played over it. And that keeps up until it goes wacky, where I turned it into reverse and started to play free over it. The Boomerang can go into reverse by just stepping on a pedal. You can go into half time or double time or reverse all by just stepping on it while it's going, which I utilize as a live function.

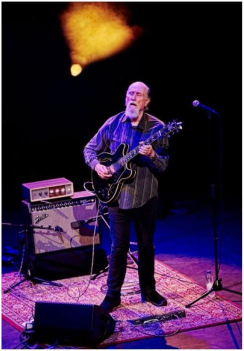
It sounds like there's some kind of pedal-point looping on "Trance De Jour," almost like a McCoy Tyner kind of a vibe.
Yeah, exactly. It's just an E pedal. That's the one where I made a five-bar loop but improvise in four-bar phrases so that it sounds longer than the five-bar loop. Because at the beginning of a four-bar phrase that comes around, the comping is different every time.

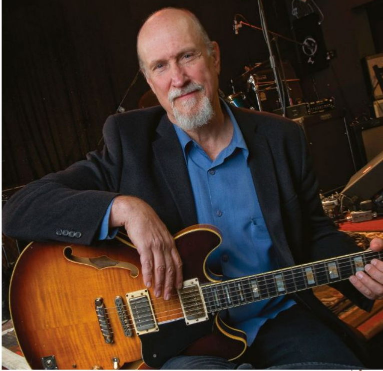
You do actually perform some solo pieces without the looper, like on "Danny Boy," which has all those cool Celtic pull-offs, as well as "My Old Flame" and

a super-funky "Junco Partner," which showcases your great syncopated chording.
Well, I got a loop going on "Danny Boy," just a low, deep drone kind of thing from tuning the low E down to D. "My Old Flame" is a tune I used to play with Charlie Haden when we did some duet gigs together. And I love the Professor Longhair version of "Junco Partner." I got to play that song with Dr. John. Such a great New Orleans song.

The Hank Williams tune "You Win Again" really brings out your vocal string-bending quality.
The string bending came from starting out with blues and rock. I guess a lot of jazz guys don't do it as much as I do. I use an unwound third string, a .022. I guess most use a wound third string. You can get an expressive thing bending the notes and sliding into them. It's just not part of the standard orthodox jazz guitar vocabulary, I guess. But for me, vibrato and bending…you gotta do it for soul. I think I got more into it last decade or so. But yeah, you gotta bend the notes. That's part of our American tradition!

Hearing standards like "It Could Happen to You" and "There Will Never Be Another You" reminds me of that great record you did in the '80s with John Abercrombie, *Solar*.





ABOVE: With his Ibanez AS-200. LEFT: Onstage at Double Bass Festival 2021, Rotterdam, October 29, 2021. Note the Universal Audio OX Amp Top Box

NICK SUTTLE (TOP); PETER VAN BREUKELEN/GETTY IMAGES (BOTTOM)

Okay, yeah, as if there were two people, one comping for the other. And it's swinging!

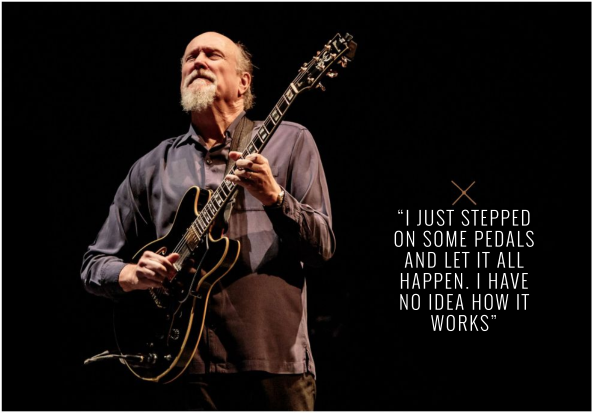
You also do the Keith Jarrett tune "Coral." I didn't remember that you had previously recorded that on that Jarrett tribute album from 20 years ago [*2000's As You're Living Yours: The Music of Keith Jarrett*].
Yeah, somebody reminded me of that recently. I had forgotten that I recorded that. And that was with Dennis Irwin on bass and the late great Ralph Peterson on drums. I've known that tune forever.

Listening to "Honest I Do" made me go back and reappreciate that album with Frisell from 1991.
Yeah, that was from *Grace Under Pressure*. That was a great album.

You've done so many albums, but you've come up with something new and different on this one.
Yeah, I've done so many records. Maybe too many. But if they keep letting you, you just do them, you know? And this one is really different.

You also cover "Not Fade Away." I know that you've done some touring and playing with Phil Lesh. I'm curious to know if you ever played "Not Fade Away" with him, because that was a Grateful Dead anthem.
Yes, I think Phil Lesh plays that song on every gig. Of course, my version of "Not Fade Away" is not from the Dead but from Buddy Holly.

I think I first heard that tune by the Rolling Stones on their debut album in 1964.
Oh, that's right! That's probably where I heard it first, actually. I have this vision of Mick Jagger playing



> “I JUST STEPPED ON SOME PEDALS AND LET IT ALL HAPPEN. I HAVE NO IDEA HOW IT WORKS”

Onstage in Milan, November 9, 2016

SERGIONE INFUSO/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

maracas on that song, maybe on *The Hollywood Palace* or *The Mike Douglas Show* or *Shindig!* or some other TV show. So it was a song we all grew up with. And really, it’s got that Bo Diddley beat. It’s only rock and roll, and I like it!

This solo album is a real achievement. I wouldn’t have thought that you’d get so hip to technology at this point in your career.
Man, I just stepped on some pedals and let it all happen. I have no idea how it works.

Did you have a previous incarnation of that Boomerang pedal with the band that made *Up All Night* [*recorded in December 2002 and January 2003*]?
Not even a previous incarnation. It’s that same pedal. I used it for weird reverse solos and things with that band. That’s how I got into it, having a bunch of sonic things happening with that band. If my Boomerang pedal broke now — and they don’t make it anymore — I don’t know what I would do. Because my routine doesn’t work on the other ones, not that I know of.

I remember seeing you play a blues gig with Robben Ford’s trio for a week-long engagement at the Blue Note in 2009. I’m surprised you never recorded that.
Right, we never did. I was playing a pink Strat on that gig. I was teased so much about it, but it sounded good. Actually, there is a bootleg recording of that that’s supposed to be pretty good that the drummer Toss Panos recorded at his house. He has like a full recording studio. We rehearsed there and learned all those tunes there. So I guess it’ll come out at some point. You know, there are so many things that I’m currently doing that I never got back to that project. And Robben ended up moving to France. [*Ford announced the move earlier this year on social media.*] So I don’t know if that will happen again.

Meanwhile, you’ve been doing some duet tours with Dave Holland.
Yeah, in November of last year when things first opened up again, before Omicron, we played the Blue Note and did a tour of Europe. That’s another project that I would like to record sometime. Dave is incredible, man. I mean, he’s a monster musician. And beyond the technique of the bass, which he is a master at, he’s just really, really good to play with and be around. And I’m also doing some touring with my new rock band, Yankee Go Home, which is Jon Cowherd on keyboards, Vicente Archer on bass and Josh Dion on drums. We’ve been having a blast on the road with that band. We’re going to be doing a recording next year, so stay tuned for that one. ◼

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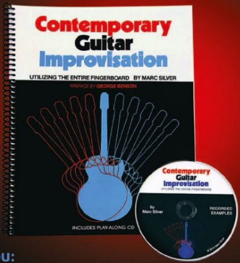
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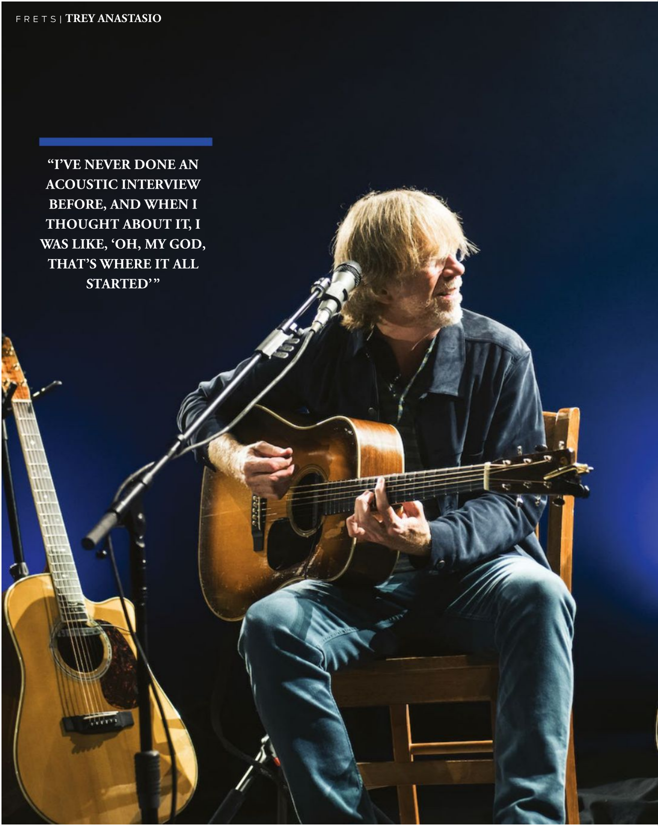


"I'VE NEVER DONE AN ACOUSTIC INTERVIEW BEFORE, AND WHEN I THOUGHT ABOUT IT, I WAS LIKE, 'OH, MY GOD, THAT'S WHERE IT ALL STARTED'"

ONE-MAN JAM

Trey Anastasio's first deep acoustic interview reveals how his classical roots inform Phish, and how an extraordinary gift inspired his premiere solo acoustic effort, *Mercy*.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAKE SILCO

IT'S RARE TO get Trey Anastasio acoustic or alone, let alone both. He's traditionally a social creature, one who is most at home jamming with his rock quartet, Phish, or leading his long-standing Trey Anastasio Band, which features a full horn section. It's even more exceptional to get him on the phone. Anastasio eschews interviews and hasn't been in these pages for ages. Over nearly four decades, we've enjoyed his playful, graceful musicality in myriad contexts, in which the lion's share of his guitar work has been performed on electric guitar.

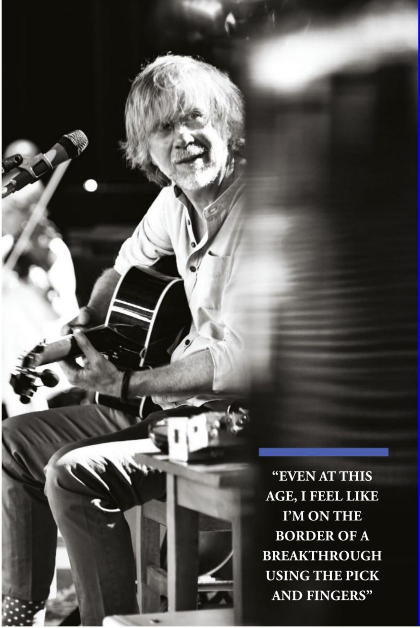
But Trey's times have been a-changin'. In 2017, he began delving into the essence of his songs on short solo acoustic tours, and in 2019 he opened up about his creative process in the documentary *Between Me and My Mind* and played a pair of sold-out acoustic shows at Carnegie Hall. An acoustic run in fall 2021 included a pair of inspirational performances at New York City's Beacon Theatre. The coup de grace came when Phish keyboardist Page McConnell gifted his bandmate a custom koa dreadnought that became Anastasio's main home companion in his New York City apartment (along with his beloved cat Joey).

Just a few months ago, Anastasio used the instrument to cut his debut solo acoustic album, *Mercy* (Rubber Jungle). The song template is double-tracked guitar with vocals, and the result is intimate, immediate and profound. Throughout the album, the guitarist's playing is clever, concise and solid. The bluesy, syncopated "Hey Stranger" is irresistibly groovy, "Blazing Down the Twisted Wire" is fabulous Phishy fun, and "Arc" takes the listener on an intricate adventure in 10/8 time, with Anastasio incorporating many open-string suspensions, or what he refers to as "rubs." Meanwhile, the title track is hauntingly arpeggiated in 6/8. All the while, Anastasio's voice is right in your ear, singing timely lyrics straight from the heart. "The music and lyrics came together," he explains. "*Mercy* is about swinging back and forth between hopelessness and hope." Anastasio starts by pleading for "A Little More Time" and ends up begging for help to understand "The Ever Changing Tide."

The Phish spearhead sounds so in his element here that one wonders how much the acoustic has informed his music all along. He took time to tell us after rocking out on Earth Day at Madison Square Garden, where Phish seemed to magically manifest dazzling aquatic holograms during an inspired jam on "Waves/Sand." With the internet still buzzing about the group's live show, and Anastasio being interviewed about his acoustic side for what he revealed to be the very first time, he seemed truly amazed to realize the connection.

How does the acoustic factor into your epic guitar story?

My guitar-playing journey started with classical guitar. I think it was my fifth-grade music teacher, Frank Jacobson, who suggested two local teachers for me when I mentioned wanting to play guitar and drums. The first guy was a 90-year-old Dixieland drummer. He taught me the rudiments of snare drum, which is about dividing rhythm. The first thing my guitar teacher had me learn were Bach gavottes. They're very simple, sort of like Bach's preludes and fugues. I love rock guitar, but I played fingerstyle classical guitar for a year before I even got an electric, so I started on acoustic in a big way. I was a huge fan of *Guitar Player* and *Frets* magazines, and I'm honored to do this interview. I remember listening to Segovia, and I recall that *Frets* had Segovia on the cover. I always thought it was so cool that *Frets* interviewed people like Segovia and Leo Kottke, who could actually play guitar, not just pose with one. I'm a fan of so many different kinds of guitarists, and we're all like tiny leaves on the end of the tree.



"EVEN AT THIS AGE, I FEEL LIKE I'M ON THE BORDER OF A BREAKTHROUGH USING THE PICK AND FINGERS"

How did your early classical training inform your compositional and improvisational style?

Modern harmony started with Bach. It's the fundamentals of counterpoint, which is about taking a theme and developing it. Bach would do them backward and forward, and stretch them out. I'm grateful to have started with that, because it had a huge effect on the way I wrote, which was so much about theme and variation. I still play that way in every single Phish jam. I'm searching for a theme, and that's the essence of a lot of the compositions. "My Friend, My Friend" takes a theme and runs with it. The middle of "Stash" sounds heavily composed, but it's really a simple phrase that goes through different key changes. The middle part of "The Squirming Coil" is another example of a Phish song that takes a little piece of the melody, stretches it out and then divides it. That's so valuable later on as a guitarist when you become an improviser. During a lot of Phish jams, I'll land on a simple phrase, almost childlike, and then run with it. Some of my favorite improvisers work that way. The best example would probably be [*saxophonist*] Sonny Rollins. He would do these long improvisations building on a theme that was very childlike, but not childish.

That's the whole essence of Phish, isn't it?

It's the whole essence. It's fascinating, because I've never done an acoustic interview before, and when I thought about it, I was like, Oh, my god, that's where it all started, on the nylon-string guitar.

And yet, ironically, the acoustic isn't a huge part of the Phish experience. What would you consider the signature tunes?

There aren't very many, but there are a few, and "The Inlaw Josie Wales" is a good one, because it's an instrumental based on an acoustic in DADGAD that wound up on a Phish record [*2000's* Farmhouse]. Sometimes when I'm writing, I take an open tuning and mess with one string by just a half or a whole step. Then it's not familiar. It's a fun game that I would recommend to any guitar player. Try starting in DADGAD and lowering the third string to F to get DADFAD. Now you're in minor. You may wind up writing in major, but the main thing is that you use your ear first instead of your fingers. It's satisfying because it makes writing so fun.

I wrote "Time Turns Elastic," which Phish does on *Joy* [*2009*], on solo acoustic guitar in four or five open tunings. Every section was a different tuning. I had to pick one and relearn the whole thing so that I could play it live. It took, like, a year, but the fact that I was in jail at the time probably helped. [*laughs*] I wrote "Harry Hood" on the beach — all that music in the middle. A lot of *Billy Breathes* [*1996*] was written on acoustic, including "Bliss," "Waste" and "Taste." I would write sections of "Fluffhead" on acoustic and then transfer it over to electric. That happened with a lot of Phish songs because I don't like changing guitars onstage. I like getting used to the sound.

SHEM ROOSE (GUITARS)

Anastasio cut *Mercy* with his Circle Strings koa dreadnought acoustic, commissioned by his Phish bandmate Page McConnell and built by luthier Adam Buchwald.

There are a few acoustic tunes peppered into my solo albums that are worth checking out as well. "Ray Dawn Balloon" is an instrumental fingerstyle guitar piece from my first album [*2002's* Trey Anastasio]. *Seis de Mayo* [*2004*] has three songs that I wrote on fingerstyle acoustic guitar, and then I orchestrated them by assigning the guitar notes to horns and strings. Check out "Andre the Giant," "Prologue" and "Discern." [*An orchestrated version of "The Inlaw Josie Wales" appears on this 2004 album as well.*]

It appears that you approach most of your modern acoustic plucking similar to your electric style, with a flatpick.

You're right about that. I love playing fingerstyle acoustic, and even at this age I feel like I'm on the border of a breakthrough using the pick and fingers. It's the frontier I'm working on right now. When the pandemic started, I swore that I was going to come out of it using pick and fingers, but it's a nightmare compared to full fingerpicking because you've got to change the fingerings for every pattern you've ever done. It's all flatpicking on the new album, but I'll switch to fingerpicking for certain things during the show.

Acoustic sets are super rare in Phish history, but over the past five years you seem to have embraced solo shows.

It's gone from feeling almost like diving into the deep end of a pool and not knowing how to swim, to "Oh, my god, I love this," to "I don't just love this — this is the greatest!" Segovia said something in *Frets* magazine to the effect of, "When I look at the guitar, I'm looking at an orchestra through a backward telescope." I started realizing he was right. It's all in there.

What was the concept behind your decision to double-track the guitars on *Mercy*?

The guitar playing was mostly flatpicked and double tracked. It's like an art-lived-by-limitation thing, where it would spread out in stereo if you listen through headphones. I love the sound of two guitars, and for this album I decided that was going to be the limitation of the interplay. I tracked to a click first and then jammed along with myself with the click muted. It all happened very fast, and I only used one microphone for everything, including the vocals. It's a Chandler REDD large-diaphragm tube mic [*with a preamp*] that's modeled after the classic Abbey Road mixing board. That's the only microphone I own. I used it and a Spire [*Spire Studio by Izotope*] to record my first pandemic album, *Lonely Trip* [*2020*]. The Spire is a cool, affordable digital connector that turns your phone into an eight-track recorder. For *Mercy*, we used the Chandler through some sort of interface and into the computer of my vocal coach, RAab [*sic*] Stevenson, at his home in Atlanta.

The guitar sounds rich and pristine, and somehow modern yet vintage.

It's a new guitar made from very old

woods. Page and I made an acoustic guitar–and-piano record during COVID [December, *released January 2021*]. It was so much fun, and, god, we cried. It was so wonderful to see each other and just play our old songs. It was so important. Spurred on by that, Page commissioned his friend Adam Buchwald, who is a luthier at Circle Strings in Burlington, Vermont, to build a guitar for me as a birthday gift. He gave it to me when I was at the Barn [*Phish's studio*] working on Sci-fi Soldier [*the band's Halloween 2021 set*]. This is my first chance to talk about it, so I've got to geek out.

It's a dreadnought made from koa, which he calls the Mother of Curl, with a 100-year-old German spruce top. I've never been in love with a guitar like this before. I have an old Martin that I also love, but I've never had an experience like this, where I just fell for a guitar. It completely changed my music landscape. There would be no *Mercy* if he hadn't given me that guitar. It's so balanced and stunningly beautiful. The low end sounds so good, and it plays so well. He used a Plek machine. I'd never played a Pleked guitar neck before. Every note up and down it is spot on and rings out. There's no buzz. So the guitar is old and new. Me and [*producer*] Vance Powell used to have this joke where we'd say, "A guitar doesn't play well until it's old enough to forget that it's a tree and accept that it's a guitar."

Is your favorite old guitar a 1943 Martin D-28?

Yes, and I play it onstage all the time at solo shows. That's like the holy grail. I walk around hugging that guitar. I have five guitars that I use to play songs in different tunings on stage. I use a 1933 Martin triple-0 for fingerstyle songs, like "The Inlaw Josie Wales." I also have a 1968 Martin D-35, which has a three-piece back, like my Martin signature model. That's the only one with a cutaway, so I use that for songs where I play high on the neck. I'm embarrassed to be able to play such great guitars. But what's so great about the Circle Strings dreadnought is it has the vibe of those old Martins with the playability of the Pleked neck that's great for everything from fingerpicking to strumming and anything in between, like the kind of hybrid picking on "6 1/2 Minutes." I cannot wait to do acoustic shows and play the Circle Strings for the first time live. It's going to sound great through the sound system.

What's your amplification strategy?

I copied it from Michael Hedges. It's two FRAPs [*flat-response audio pickups*] in stereo and a Sunrise in the middle. The Sunrise is a magnetic sound-hole pickup, and that signal runs through an op-amp [*operational amplifier*] into a pedalboard, with expression pedals to control echo with tap tempo, octave up, octave down and a looper. I'll use that on a tune like "Twist" when I want to go into la-la land, which I like to do. There's a Victoria Reverberato tube vibrato reverb unit at the end of that signal, which is set dead center in the room. FRAPs are contact pickups under the bridge. The one under the left side captures more of the low end, and the one on the right captures more of the high end. That provides a very natural sense of motion from left to right because, theoretically, the low strings come out of one speaker and the high strings come out of the other. All three signals feed through a special cord that sends the Sunrise to the pedalboard and the FRAPs to the house. Adam put all that into the Circle Strings guitar, but not all of my guitars have the full system. Sometimes we'll incorporate a microphone onstage as well for a less processed, more organic sound.

Will you need to switch guitars to cover any songs in open tunings from *Mercy*?

There are no open tunings on the new record; there are tons of open strings rubbing against the fretted notes. "Arc" is full of rubs. It sounds hard, or like it might be in an open tuning, but it's not. There are some great voicings in "A Little More Time" that I found using DADFAD and then transferred to standard, like the half-step rub with the F♯ against the open G when I play that version of E minor [*Emin add 9*]. That's what I love to hear all day long when I listen to David Rawlings play with Gillian Welch — rubs to the end of the Earth. I love him, and if he were here he'd say, "That's the whole thing." I like to do that as well, and it's one of the two main reasons why I like a solo acoustic song performance. It focuses on the vocals and lyrics, and opens up worlds that would get stomped over if played with a band. ◼

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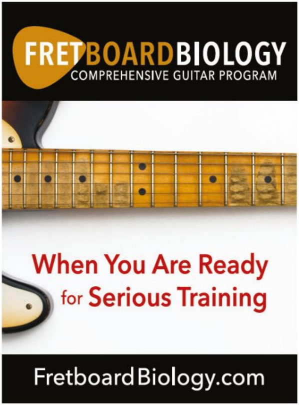

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HUMAN TOUCH

Unlock the secrets of expressive melody playing with legato and staccato phrasing, finger sliding, string muting, bending and vibrato.

BY PATRICK BRENNAN

LIKE A PAINTER'S brush stroke or an author's turn of phrase, every great guitarist has a signature touch, which is a confluence of many factors, from musical influences and equipment choices to all aspects of technique. But at the most granular level of anyone's playing you'll find one crucial element: their unique approaches to note articulation. Articulation is the musical term for the way you attack an individual note or chord, as well as the way you connect one note to another. Examples of guitar articulations include picking with a downstroke or upstroke (each of which sounds a little different), fingerpicking, thumbpicking, palm muting, staccato phrasing (cutting a note's durations short) and legato techniques, such as hammering-on, pulling-off and tapping. Combined with other expressive elements involving the fret hand, such as sliding from note to note, bending and/or shaking a string (vibrato), the possibilities for giving notes and phrases an expressive, vocal-like quality are wide ranging and nearly limitless. So how do you know which articulations to use and when? Developing a good instinct for this artform can take years of diligent practice to attain, and it can be perplexing to know where to start, but it is foundational to anyone's playing. This lesson will help you hone your note articulation skills and cultivate your own signature touch and lead-playing style.

DYNAMICS

Tragically, the importance of *dynamics*, or volume contrasts, is often ignored, when in reality it is arguably as important as the other four elements of music — *melody*, *rhythm*, *harmony* and *timbre* (tone). Dynamics refers to variances in your volume or the intensity of your playing throughout a piece of music. With respect to pick-hand articulations, it involves *accenting* certain notes, which means picking or plucking them more forcefully than normal, giving them greater emphasis so that they stand out. Using accents gives a melody a sense of liveliness. To demonstrate this, let's first look at a string of repeating, alternate-picked C notes in **Ex. 1a**. Without any accents or variation in pitch or articulation, we have a monotonous, droning stream of notes. Add accents on every downbeat, by picking the first 16th note harder than normal, as in **Ex. 1b**, and suddenly it begins to sound like music. But the fun really begins when you start varying the placement of accents so that they fall on some of the *upbeats* too, as illustrated in **Ex. 1c**. By shifting some of the accents to the second, third or fourth 16th note of the beat, we develop a sense of syncopation in the music, creating depth and building momentum where there wasn't any before. And this is only with one repeating note, comparable to the way a drummer will use dynamic accents within a steady stream of 16th notes on the snare.

Building on the previous example, **Ex. 1d** adds *palm muting* (P.M.), which involves laying the edge of your pick-hand palm on the strings just in front of the bridge as you pick. Doing this dampens, or mutes, the string vibrations, producing a more subdued and "chunky"-sounding attack and a quicker note decay, or shorter duration (less sustain). As this example demonstrates, doing this on most of the unaccented notes exaggerates the contrasts between them and the unmuted, accented notes, further enhancing the phrase's dynamic range and musical appeal.

OTHER BASIC ARTICULATIONS

It's easy to think of your picking hand as comparable to a sledgehammer or a scalpel: Either you're indiscriminately bashing away at chords or delicately chipping away at single notes. In reality, your pick hand is more like a Swiss Army

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knife: a multifaceted mechanism that can be wielded with elegance, violence, or any conceivable blending of the two touches. Every aspect of your picking, even the way you hold your pick, affects the articulation of every note you play, so this is something to carefully consider.

Let's start by establishing a base exercise. **Ex. 2a** is a two-octave G major scale (G, A, B, C, D, E, F♯) played across all six strings, using three notes per string and alternate picking. Throughout the next couple of examples we will be modifying this exercise to demonstrate different ways in which you can wield your pick to more nuanced effect.

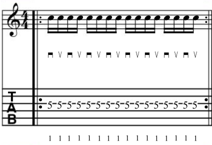
In **Ex. 2b**, you will see a small dot above each note. These are staccato markings. *Staccato* is the musical term for "short in duration," specifically 50 percent of the note's normal value. The staccato dot tells you to silence the note shortly after striking it, with a brief "hole of silence" before playing the next note, as if there were a rest falling between the notes. You can effectively cut off each note by momentarily loosening your fretting finger's grip on the string after picking, but without letting go of the string. The movement is small and barely visible. As you play the staccato version of this G major scale, you'll hear that it sounds much more "pointed" and "choppy" than before.

Ex. 2c mixes and matches these approaches, with courtesy *tenuto* markings (the dashes over certain notes) that remind you to hold those notes for their normal, full duration. It can be tricky to switch back and forth between tenuto and staccato articulations, so practice this exercise slowly at first and, as always, with a metronome.

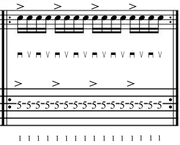
LEGATO TECHNIQUES

Legato is the musical term for connecting melody notes together seamlessly. For guitarists, this means playing two or more consecutive notes on a given string after picking only the first note. In music notation, legato phrasing is indicated by a *slur*, which is a curved line that arcs from one note to the next. The slur indicates that only the first note — where the arc begins — is picked.

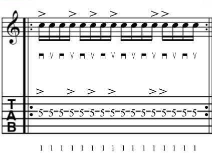
Ex. 1a


T
A
B
5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

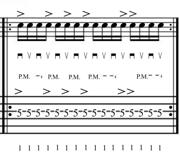
Ex. 1b


5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

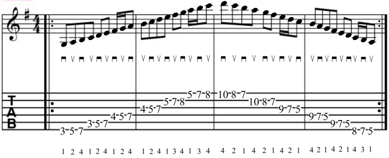
Ex. 1c


T
A
B
5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

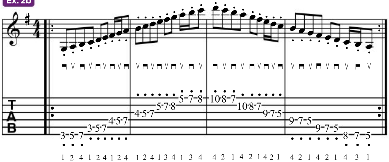
Ex. 1d


P.M.
P.M.
P.M.
P.M.
P.M.
5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

Ex. 2a


T
A
B
3-5-7 3-5-7 4-5-7 4-5-7 5-7-8 5-7-8 10-8-7 10-8-7 9-7-5 9-7-5 9-7-5 8-7-5
1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 3 1

Ex. 2b


T
A
B
3-5-7 3-5-7 4-5-7 4-5-7 5-7-8 5-7-8 10-8-7 10-8-7 9-7-5 9-7-5 9-7-5 8-7-5
1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 3 1

There are three ways to achieve a legato articulation on the guitar:

1) Hammering-on: moving from an open or fretted note to a higher note on the same string by firmly tapping, or *hammering*, a fretting finger down onto the string and holding it there until it's time to play the next note, as shown in **Ex. 3a** with the notes C and D.

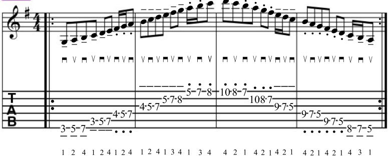
2) Pulling-off: moving to a lower note on the same string by *removing* the higher note's fretting finger to reveal the lower note, as illustrated in **Ex. 3b**. If the lower note is fretted — that is, not an open string — it should be pre-fretted before initiating the pull-off, so as to "catch" the pull-off while the string is still vibrating. To keep the string vibrating and ensure that the lower note rings with sufficient volume, the finger that's performing the pull off should slightly yank the string sideways, in toward the palm, as it leaves the string, as opposed to simply lifting the finger straight up.

3) Sliding: moving a single finger up or down a string from one fretted note to another, by shifting the finger while keeping it pressed against the string, as demonstrated in **Ex. 3c**. When sliding, maintain just enough finger pressure against the string to keep it ringing. But you needn't press any harder than that, as doing so will only serve to create undue friction against the fretboard, making the sliding movement needlessly arduous to perform.

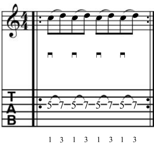
What about fretboard tapping? That technique, while performed with the pick hand, is essentially a different method of hammering-on and pulling-off, in terms of the resultant legato articulation and sound. So in terms of execution, the same guidelines apply.

The three previous examples have you connecting only two notes, C and D. But you can also chain together a variety of legato articulations to clearly sound multiple notes on the same string without having to pick it more than once. **Ex. 4** is based on the C major scale (C, D, E, F, G, A, B) and incorporates the use of *double hammer-ons*, *double pull-offs* and *two-directional finger slides* to create a smooth, fluid-sounding melody.

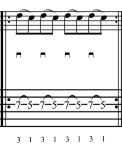
Ex. 2c


T
A
B
1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 2 1 4 3 1

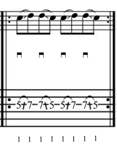
Ex. 3a


T
A
B
5 7 5 7 5 7 5 7
1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3

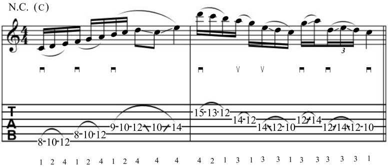
Ex. 3b


7 5 7 5 7 5 7 5
3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1

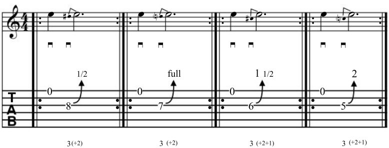
Ex. 3c


5 7 7 5 5 7 7 5
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

Ex. 4


N.C. (C)
3
T
A
B
8 10 12 8 10 12 9 10 12 10 14 15 13 12 14 12 14 12 10 12 14 12 14 12 10
1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 4 4 4 2 1 3 1 3 3 1 3 3 3 3 3 1

Ex. 5

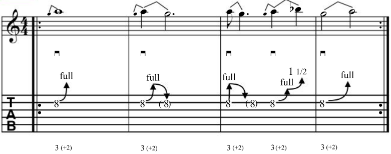

1/2
full
1 1/2
2
T
A
B
0 8 0 7 0 6 0 5
3(+2)
3 (+2)
3 (+2+1)
3 (+2+1)

STRING BENDING

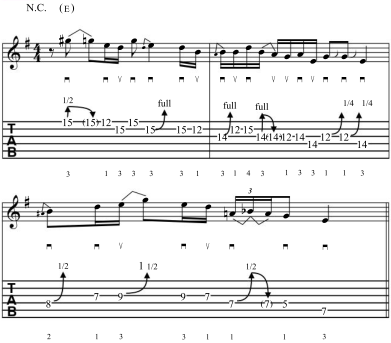
In many styles, the coolest and most expressive way to articulate a note on the guitar is to *bend* up to it from below, either as a quick grace note or in rhythm, or time — what's called a *rhythmic bend*. The technique and art of string bending — and making it sound polished — takes a great deal of control and practice to master, requiring highly trained fret-hand muscles that are "programmed" and continually guided by the ear. A bend may be performed by any finger — although the pinkie (4) is the weakest and hardest to control and is not advisable to use much — and by either pushing the string upward (away from the palm) or pulling it downward (in toward the palm). When bending the high E string, your only option is to push it in toward the middle strings, as pulling it downward would cause it to fall off the fretboard. Likewise, when bending the low E string, you can only pull it downward, for the same reason. With the other four strings, you have the option of either pushing or pulling, and each technique feels different. When push-bending, you'll want to hook your thumb around the top side of the fretboard (by the low E string) to give your hand an anchor point with which to keep the neck in place as you push the string and neck upward with your bending finger(s).

For any bend greater than a half step, which is equal to one fret above the note you're bending from, it's beneficial to employ *reinforced fingering*, using two or more fingers to push or pull the string, for added strength and pitch control. The ring finger (3) generally works best as the note-fretting finger, with the middle finger (2) serving as the reinforcing finger, placed one fret lower on the same string. For bends greater than a whole step, you'll find it advantageous to additionally enlist the aid of the index finger (1), placed one fret below the middle finger. So it's "3(+2)," or "3(+2 and 1)." And while pushing or pulling a string up or down will raise its pitch, the push-bending technique is the most widely used, as lead licks are most often played on the higher strings.

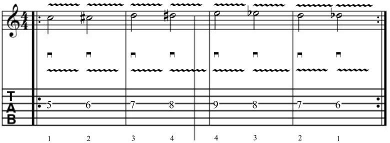
Ex. 6



Ex. 7



Ex. 8

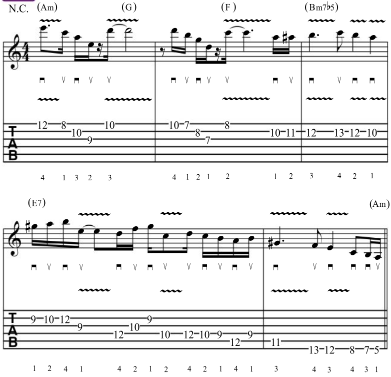


Using progressively wider intervals, **Ex. 5** is an exercise designed to sharpen your ear and technique for precision string bending, with each successive bend becoming more challenging to perform. In each bar, you begin by picking the open high E string, which will serve as your reference "target pitch" for each ensuing push-bend on the G string. You'll start with a half-step bend from D♯ to E at the 8th fret, then subsequently move the bend down chromatically (one fret at a time), increasing the distance, or width, of the bend in half-step increments until you reach the 5th-fret C note, which is bent up a whopping two whole steps, or a major 3rd (C to E). This last bend is tough to perform, so don't feel discouraged if you can't bend the note all the way up to E at first. With practice, you'll get better at it. Pitch accuracy is the name of the game here, so make sure every bend matches the pitch of the open high E note dead-on, and without overshooting it.

Ex. 6 demonstrates a few of the many things you can do with a single-note push-bend, starting from G on the B string's 8th fret. You will repeatedly bend the note up a whole step, to A, but each bend will take on a different shape, or "slope," and character. Depicted in this exercise are the standard *held bend*, where you bend the string and hold the note, as in the previous exercise; the *bend-and-release*, whereby you bend the note, then release it back to its original pitch; the *pre-bend* (also known as a "ghost bend"), for which you silently bend the string, pick it, then release the bend (this is known as a *pre-bend and release*, or a *reverse bend*); the *multi-step bend*, which consists of a bend added on top of another bend; and, finally, the *delayed bend*, for which you gradually bend the string after picking it, so that you hit the target pitch a number of beats later, in this case, two.

Now let's put these ideas to work in a melodic exercise. **Ex. 7** is based on the E minor pentatonic scale (E, G, A, B, D) starting in 12th position. Here you'll use all the types of bends demonstrated in the previous exercise across all six strings, while adding a new, previously undiscussed type of bend — *the quarter-step bend*. Also known as a "curl," this is a slight, subtle bend that rises only about midway to the next higher note and provides just a hint of color and soulful expressiveness to a melody. In this case, you'll want to pull the G string downward at the 12th fret, in toward your palm, using only your 1st finger.

Ex. 9



VIBRATO

One of the most distinguishing elements of a guitarist's sound, or "voice," is his or her *vibrato*. Recall B.B. King's fluttering index-finger trills, David Gilmour's subtle tremolo-bar warbles and Yngwie Malmsteen's wide, violin-like note shakes at the end of a blistering run. Every great guitarist's vibrato is unique and distinctive, and the key is to find a technical approach that's comfortable for your hands and sounds vocal-like and pleasing to your ears.

There are various ways to achieve a musically appealing vibrato effect on the guitar, such as by playing with a slide or using a whammy bar, but here we'll limit our discussion to the technique of finger vibrato. Keep in mind that, due to the presence of frets, each of which stops a string at a fixed point, a finger vibrato is best achieved not by wiggling the finger back and forth, or sideways, as you would see a violinist, cellist or slide player do, but rather by performing a series of quick, evenly spaced "micro bends" — less than a quarter step — and releases as a note is held. A quarter tone, or quarter step, is more than enough of a pitch fluctuation to produce a pronounced vibrato effect, although some players, for more swagger, like to go with a wider vibrato, bending the pitch as far as a half step, or beyond that, for a bold, over-the-top vibrato effect.

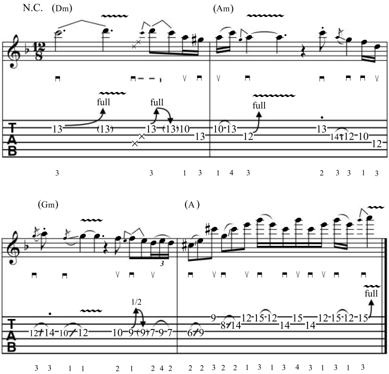
First and foremost, as you administer a finger vibrato, make sure you manage to convey the intended "base pitch," with the vibrato repeatedly modulating it up or down but always returning to it. Next, the vibrato movement should come from the wrist, not the fingers. Simply hold the note with your finger and either twist, pull, push, or rock your wrist back and forth, depending on the string(s) you're playing on and your personal preference. This method is ideal because the wrist is much stronger than any individual finger and can pivot with ease while the finger holds the note in place and "goes along for the ride" with the wrist movement.

Also, it's good to practice using vibrato with each individual finger, as your approach and technique may vary from finger to finger. **Ex. 8** has us shifting from one finger to the next as we ascend the G string in half steps, starting from C at the 5th fret. Note that vibrato is indicated by a squiggly horizontal line.

An important factor to consider is that the character, or "feel," of a vibrato is determined by two variables: the *speed* and *width* of the pitch fluctuations, or modulations. Depending on the song's tempo, the speed, or rate, of the vibrato can be thought of as being any rhythmic pattern, ranging from eighth-note triplets to 16th notes, 16th-note triplets or 32nd notes. The important thing is that the rhythmic pulsation remains consistent. The width of a vibrato refers to the amplitude of the pitch modulation, or how far you're raising or dipping the note up or down. When you first tackle Ex. 8, strive to maintain a consistent vibrato speed and width with each finger. Once you feel comfortable and confident doing that, you can try altering the sound of the vibrato effect as you move through the exercise, gaining or reducing speed, starting out narrow and then widening it, or vice versa. You may choose to use a one-size-fits-all approach to vibrato, which can work well, but you can truly set yourself apart by changing up the speed and width from note to note. Also, try performing this exercise on every string.

Let's look at a melodic example that employs vibrato using different fingers across all six strings. **Ex. 9** is a jazzy melody in the key of A minor, to which you'll apply vibrato, at the speed and width of your choosing, to any note that's held for the duration of an eighth note or longer. Take great care in applying each of the vibratos, using your ears to guide your fingers. Also, try playing the exercise without any vibrato, to get a clear sense of the basic melody. Doing this will help you decide what kind of vibrato "feel" works best for each sustained note. See what happens when you adjust these elements on a single note *as you're holding it*. Also, consider delaying the onset of vibrato with a long-held note, which can be a very expressive technique, one that you'll hear great singers employ.

Ex. 10



TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Let's finish up with a "grand finale" musical exercise that employs every type of articulation we've explored, plus a new one — *bend vibrato* — for which you bend up to a note then apply vibrato to it by partially releasing the bend by about a quarter tone, then restoring it to the target pitch in a quick, even, repetitious manner. So in this case you're actually dipping below the target pitch to create the vibrato effect, which can sound the most vocal-like and pleasing of all vibratos. **Ex. 10** is a bluesy melody based around the D natural minor scale (D, E, F, G, A, B♭, C) that features this and all the other articulations we've covered. One thing you may notice in this exercise is that not every note is given a special articulation, nor are there too many examples of any one articulation.

As with most things in art and life, there needs to be *balance*. It's perfectly acceptable for some notes to be played plainly — just picked. The key is to tastefully decide *how* and *where* to apply special articulations. ■

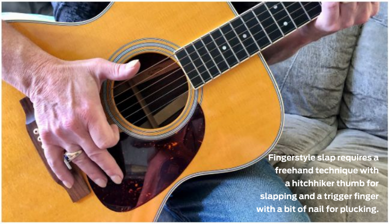
MORE ONLINE!

For audio of this lesson, go to **fanlink.to/SpiritHustlerAlbum.** For video content, visit **guitarplayer.com/aug22-learn**

Writing and Recording Acoustic Rock, Pt. 3

Fingerstyle slap in the style of Spirit Hustler.

BY JIMMY LESLIE



Fingerstyle slap requires a freehand technique with a hitchhiker thumb for slapping and a trigger finger with a bit of nail for plucking.

KERRI LESLIE

THERE'S NOTHING MORE rewarding than when technique and artistry come together creatively. Interviewing players from across the musical universe for 20 years has provided unique opportunities for me to learn from some incredibly artistic technicians, and for the past half decade I've been funneling lessons learned into Spirit Hustler's debut album. Learning fingerstyle slapping and plucking was a core breakthrough that led me to a lot of the most interesting material. I can't think of another player that does this exactly, so I'm happy to share this revelation with you.

INSIDE FINGERSTYLE SLAP

I began messing with slap-and-pop technique by copping funk-bass licks on guitar, which is a great way to start. Acoustic offers more percussiveness and room to operate, so it's generally better than electric. Simply use heavy strings and focus on the bottom four. The basic approach isn't rocket science: Stick your thumb out like a hitchhiker and whack the knuckle down on one of the two lowest strings. Then pluck upward with the index fingernail to grab notes on the third and fourth strings. Once you've got that under your belt, start incorporating the top two strings into thumb-and-trigger finger-plucking patterns.

INSPIRATIONS AND EXAMPLES

I found inspiration to dig deeper working alongside "spank guitar" maestro Jude Gold at *GP* and interviewing funk bassists like Fishbone's Norwood Fisher and Larry Graham — the root of all "thumpin' & pluckin'" — for *Bass Player*. But interestingly, it was acoustic players that helped seal the deal. At a NAMM jam with Santa Cruz Guitars artists (including James Nash) who were using flatpicks and fingerpicks, I realized my freehand fingerstyle wouldn't compare unless I got fake nails, and it was a sea change to always have a hook ready to grab those top strings. The technique is unwieldy at first, but once you get the hang of it, the flow becomes almost automatic. All sorts of new ideas open up, especially in open tunings.

See the accompanying video tutorial linked at the top of this page, and listen to the Spirit Hustler album for examples such as the pre-choruses on "Circlin' the Sun," covered here last month. Another song anchored by fingerstyle slap is "Angels of Summertime," which includes a cameo from Christie Lenée. You might not think a slap-bass inspiration would lead to a tender ballad, but it was the basis for the main part. This versatile technique is also the backbone for the Americana-style stuff on "Hard-Fought Magic" and "Honey Moon" (with Nash on mandolin).

RECORDING TIPS

It's best to focus the technique into a small range of motion when recording. Instead of using the top of the fretboard as a springboard, which can be helpful and fun onstage, keep the plucking hand anchored on or near the bridge in the studio. The tone is deeper and more consistent. Keep the mic away from the sound hole by placing it below the bridge and slightly toward the endpin on the lower bout. Ribbon mics work best. We used a pair of vintage Coles right next to each other. You can hear that tone at the top of "Angels of Summertime."

BEST SLAP ACOUSTICS

Key elements for a good slap acoustic guitar include a full scale length, robust bass and a quick response to a fast attack. The best I've found is a Martin M-36. The 0000 body style is essentially a jumbo OM, and it has such a snappy, bass-like response that I refer to it as the M-Bomber. It's featured on "Angels of Summertime." The tuning is E modal, which goes, from low to high, E B E E B E. See last month's column for more specifics about that tuning.

Have a blast learning fingerstyle slap. May it inspire thrilling new riffs and licks that lead to outstanding songs.

Jimmy Leslie has been Frets Editor since 2016. See many Guitar Player– *and Frets-related videos on his YouTube channel, and learn all about his acoustic/electric rock group at spirithustler.com.*

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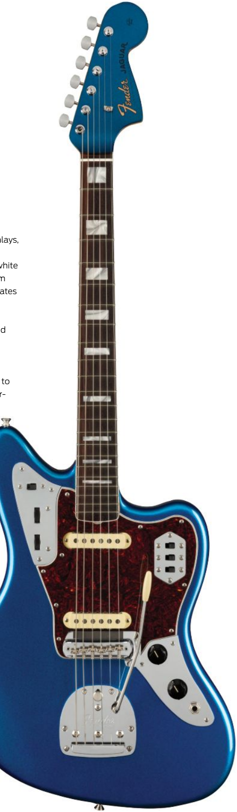


FENDER

60th Anniversary Jaguar

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

IN 1962, FENDER rolled out the Jaguar, a new top-of-the-line instrument that company literature said offered "faster, more comfortable" playing. The Jag's offset waist gave its body a look that was very different from a Strat, and it went offroad with a 24-inch scale neck that had a bound rosewood fretboard and pearloid block inlays, a pair of tall single-coil pickups with "sawtooth" shields on both side of their white covers, and an elaborate switching system that occupied three separate chromed plates and gripped a total of eight controls: two knobs, two thumbwheels and four slider switches. Fender was on a roll in 1962, and the Jaguar's eye-popping array of colors, chrome and controls signaled that a new sheriff was in town.

The 60th Anniversary Jaguar adheres to the original format and features a lacquer-finished body and neck, and a faux-tortoiseshell pickguard, and it comes in Mystic Lake Placid Blue or Mystic Dakota Red sparkle colors that look fantastic with the matching painted headstock. The 60th Anniversary Jaguar series also includes the modernized Ultra Luxe model that has a pair of humbuckers, a 25 ½–inch scale neck with a 10- to 14-inch compound radius, and through-body stringing, with no trem.

The 60th Anniversary Jaguar on review here is a time capsule affair that suggests what it must have been like to open the case and revel at the radical new Fender back in the day. At the time it seemed a perfect bomb to drop on the Southern California surf scene, and was even promoted by Brian Wilson. However, the Jaguar didn't meet sales expectations and lasted only until 1975. But in the '80s and '90s, guitarists like Tom Verlaine, Thurston Moore, Kevin Shields. Kurt Cobain, John Frusciante, Johnny Marr and PJ Harvey were slinging Jags (which were relatively inexpensive and made good

SPECIFICATIONS

60th Anniversary Jaguar

CONTACT fender.com

PRICE $2,499 street, hardshell case included

NUT Bone, 1.650" wide

NECK '60s "C" profile maple with lacquer finish

FRETBOARD Round-lam rosewood with white binding, 24" scale, 7.5" radius, white pearled block inlays

FRETS 22 Vintage Tall

TUNERS "F" stamped vintage style

BODY Alder with lacquer finish

BRIDGE Vintage-style adjustable six-saddle with threaded steel saddles. Vintage-style floating tremolo with lock button and push-in arm

PICKUPS 60th Anniversary jaguar single-coils

CONTROLS Lead circuit controls (slide switch down): On/off slide switches for neck and bridge pickups, volume, master tone; two-position slide switch for bass-cut "strangle" circuit. Rhythm circuit controls (slide switch up): Two thumbwheel controls for neck pickup volume and tone

EXTRAS Embroidered 60th Anniversary case. Available in Mystic Lake Placid Blue and Mystic Dakota Red. Also offered in Ultra Luxe version which has two humbuckers, a 25 ½" scale and no trem

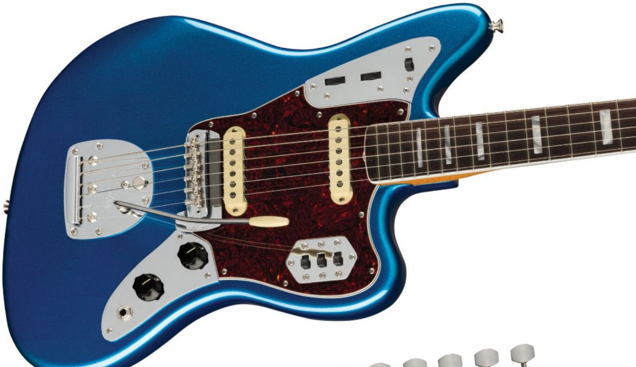
FACTORY STRINGS Fender USA 250R nickel plated steel .010–.046

WEIGHT 9.4 lbs (as tested)

BUILT USA

KUDOS Looks killer. Plays great. Switching system delivers a wide spectrum of tones

CONCERNS Heavy. Tremolo lock not functioning on my test model



Fender
JAGUAR

candidates for modding), and this helped the Jaguar enjoy a sort of cult status among alternative rockers. Fender reissued the Jaguar in 1999 as part of its American Vintage Reissue series, and it has gone through numerous iterations in the company's Signature and Custom Shop models, as well as the American Original, Vintera and Squier Classic Vibe lines.

At over nine pounds, our 60th Anniversary review model finished in Mystic Lake Placid Blue is a heavy guitar, but it feels good sitting or standing, and it's well set up and plays great thanks to the neck's '60s "C" shape and the easy feel imparted by the slightly shorter scale. The evenly crowned and polished Vintage Tall frets help too, as do the low, buzz-free action and tuneful intonation. The Jag's floating vibrato (or tremolo, as Fender calls it) is incorporated into the tailpiece, which has a section of bent steel rising from it that the strings load into on their way to the separate bridge, with its six threaded-steel adjustable saddles. The vibrato has a soft feel, and it returned to pitch reliably when working it with the long push-in bar. It adds lovely expression to chords and melodies, and it sure sounds vibey through a blackface Fender drenched in reverb.

You can can also lock it in place via a mechanical button, although for some reason that function wasn't working on our test guitar. As per '60s spec, there's a mute that works by pushing a piece of rubber against the strings behind the bridge pickup, for a decidedly "plinky" tone.

True to form, the pickups feature Alnico 5 magnets. They're clear and balanced, and produce a cool variety of tones via the adventurous switching system, which operates as such: With the upper slide switch in the down position, Lead mode is active, and you use the first two slide switches on the lower-cutaway control plate to turn the neck and bridge pickups on and off, controlling volume and tone with the fluted knobs. The rearmost slide switch activates the bass-cut "strangle" circuit, which makes the pickups sound skinnier and a little more funky when they're on together. With the upper slider switch in the up position, the Jag reverts to Rhythm mode, in which only the neck pickup is active, and you control its volume and tone via the two thumbwheel pots. The tones in this mode are thicker, a little darker, and cool for jazz and old-school blues, and it's convenient to be able to preset two distinct tones and toggle between them for rhythm and lead. Played clean and overdriven using a selection of grind boxes, and amplified with either a Fender Deluxe Reverb or a Victoria Double Deluxe, the Jag was fun and easily deployable on everything from alt-country to rock, soul, R&B, jazz and world music.

Kudos to Fender for celebrating the Jaguar in this 60th Anniversary rendition while also providing a different spin with the Ultra Luxe version, which — with its dual humbuckers, 25 ½-inch scale and no trem — highlights what a great platform the Jaguar is for those who love hot-rodded classic Fenders.

LAVA

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

Blue Lava Touch

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

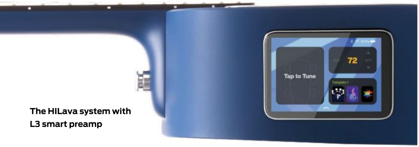
LAST MONTH, WE took a look at Lava's first smart guitar, the ME 3, which won an Editors' Pick Award. This month, we'll carry on with the brand-new Blue Lava Touch, which promises Lava's considerable innovation in a slightly more conventional, smaller and far more affordable package. It features virtually the same insanely cool HILava software system, packed with amazing apps for onboard effects, recording, looping, tuning and practice, as well as a phone app with a social media element. Despite all that, the guitar is decidedly different. The Blue Lava Touch is Lava Music's first smart guitar made from high-pressure laminate with a bolt-on neck, rather than the unibody carbon-fiber design that has been the brand's hallmark design since 2017.

The Blue Lava Touch is a compact companion that measures 36 inches long, and its two-toned, pop-art inspired aesthetic is eye-catching. Our review unit happened to be the Ice/Ocean Blue model, but the guitar is available in several other hues. The most distinctive feature is the sound port, which looks like a stretched oval bound in metallic plastic located in the upper bout. A shiny logo apparently made from the same material lays below a painted bridge, while matte aluminum tuners line either side of a rounded headstock. To my eyes it looks like a vintage Danelectro or Gretsch crossed with the guitar equivalent of a Tesla.

The Blue Lava Touch neck is bolted to a wooden block inside the body, facilitating a nearly heel-less design similar to its unibody carbon cousins, and facilitating playability all the way to the top of its 18-fret 'board. The neck is precise, with accurate intonation, which is rare for an affordable acoustic with a short scale length.

The Blue Lava Touch's tone belies its diminutive body size as well. It has none of the shrillness one might expect in the top end. The treble is actually quite tempered, the bass response is shockingly robust, and the mids balance everything out nicely. You can achieve drastically different tones by changing plucking-hand positions from near the bridge, where it's nice and bright, to near the top of the fingerboard, where it's mellow. In any position, there's a funky, flat kind of quality to its fundamental-forward tone that I felt matched the "future pawnshop prize" aesthetic, as I dubbed it in the last issue's review. The unique body shape takes a little getting used to, but it's small enough to be lap-friendly, and once you get the ingenious Lava Ideal Strap 2 for Blue Lava (sold separately for $59) locked on, it's super secure.

The star of the show is the HILava system with L3 smart preamp, which operates like a simple smartphone implanted topside and loaded with guitar apps. Resonance-based effects turn the guitar into its own acoustic amp. In addition to standard effects like reverb and delay, there are unique ones like Cry Baby and Banana Bass that offer everything from wah to octave effects and ring modulation, and which are even illustrated on the screen with fun graphics. Even the standard stuff is pretty tricked out, like the cavernous, cosmic reverb of Black Hole and the repetitious, clockwork-like delay of Big Ben. They're tweakable too. Given the organic nature of actuator-induced acoustic effects and the wild inclinations of Lava's



The HILava system with L3 smart preamp

programming team, the resulting tones have a natural foundation with radical enhancement. The processing becomes much more prominent when you plug in, and that takes some getting used to.

Other apps include a multifaceted tuner, a customizable practice program with chord recognition and ear training, a flexible metronome, a looper that can be used with or without backing grooves, and an onboard recorder that can serve as a songwriting scratch pad, with up to four tracks. Lava even offers a social element for sharing creations with other users via the Lava+ app. It pairs the guitar with an actual smartphone, where recordings and other functionality can be managed. [*See last month's review of the Lava ME 3 for a deeper dive into the electronics.*]

The Blue Touch delivers on Lava's design goal to broaden the audience for its groundbreaking instruments. For those who simply don't dig carbon fiber, here's a similar guitar made of a high-pressure laminate composite that sounds and feels more wooden. Lava claims that the Blue is nearly as weatherproof as its other instruments while being even more environmentally friendly due to the recyclable materials in the composite. For those who want smart electronics at a much more affordable price, the Blue Lava Touch offers almost the exact same system as the ME 3, the main differences being half the onboard storage capacity for your loops and tunes, and a battery with slightly more than half of the capacity. The Wireless Airflow Charger ($119 street) is helpful and acts as a handy stand with a fold-up design for portability. Running time lasts about four to five hours per full charge and will diminish over time. That's a concern, especially for gigging pros, but the Blue is definitely designed with more of the hobbyist or beginner in mind. That said, ace engineer and Go-Go's guitar tech Travis Kasperbauer was way into it, and he dug it equally for being a killer acoustic.

Most folks I showed it to were intrigued, and many said something along the lines of having a brother, sister, niece or nephew who would love that guitar. Of course, the main concern is about what's going to become of the onboard processer that seems so smart now. This one froze up a few times and will age out eventually. The good news is that the guitar alone is practically worth the price. Add in the awesome electronics and the Blue Lava Touch is, like its ME 3 sibling, worthy of an Editors' Pick Award. ■

The Lava Ideal Strap 2 for Blue Lava (here), and (right) a black version of the guitar in its Wireless Airflow Charger.

SPECIFICATIONS

Blue Lava Touch

CONTACT lavamusic.com

PRICE $649 street with Lite Bag, $699 with AirFlow Bag

NUT 1.72" wide

NECK High pressure laminate

FRETBOARD High pressure laminate, 23.5" scale

FRETS 18

TUNERS Lava matte aluminum, 18:1 ratio

BODY High pressure laminate

BRIDGE High pressure laminate

ELECTRONICS HILava system with L3 smart preamp and FreeBoost 2.0 effects actuator, 2G memory, 16G storage

CONTROLS Volume wheel and on/off/sleep/wake button inside sound port, 3 ½" multitouch screen on top side with status, menu and app icons

ONBOARD APPS Tuner, metronome, recorder, loops (grooves, not a looper), practice program, effects

EFFECTS 50+ presets consisting of reverb, delay, reverse delay, chorus, tremolo, phaser, flanger, ring mod, octave, stutter, wah, slow gear, pitch shift, shaper filter, distortion and impulse response for line out

LAVA+ APP Syncs with HILava system via LavaCloud to keep track of effects templates, favorite grooves, practice summary, music, pictures, and devices plus top and trending recordings by other Lava players

CONNECTIVITY Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, ¼" output jack, USB-C jack for charging, contact charging available via AirFlow Wireless Charger (sold separately, $119 street)

POWER 5,000 mAh lithium-ion battery, USB-C to A cable provided, 15W USB-C charging adaptor not included

FACTORY STRINGS Phosphor bronze, .012–.052

WEIGHT 4.4 lbs (as tested)

BUILT China

KUDOS Innovative, outstanding value. Groovy modern/vintage look, robust parlor tone in travel size, fabulous playability. Dazzling onboard resonance effects plus recording, looping, practice program & more. App syncs to guitar and connects online community

CONCERNS Shelf life of sophisticated electronics. Battery capacity. Amplified tone significantly wetter than acoustic

GuitarPlayer Editors' Pick

LINE 6

Catalyst 100 1x12 Combo

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

SPECIFICATIONS

Catalyst 100 1x12 Combo
PRICE $399 street

CHANNELS 2
CONTROLS Channel A, Channel B, Manual buttons. Amp Selector (Clean, Boutique, Chime, Crunch, Dynamic, Hi Gain), variable boost (with on/off button); gain, bass, mid, treble, presence, channel volume. Reverb knob (with on/off/select button), effects knob with on/off/select button, tap button (press and hold to engage tuner), reverb (with on/off/select button), master volume
EFFECTS Delay (simple delay, vintage digital, tape echo, analog delay, dual delay, dynamic). Modulation (chorus, tremolo, phaser, flanger, U-Vibe, Rotary). Pitch (octaver, growler, pitch harmony, pitch shift, octave fuzz, synth string). Reverb (spring, hall, chamber, plate, shimmer, modulated)
REAR PANEL Power switch, output power switch (100W, 50W, .5W mute), USB jack, MIDI in jack, foot-switch jack (for optional LFS2 switcher), 1/8" aux in, 1/4" headphone jack, effects loop (with FX loop, power-amp in switch), XLR direct out with ground-lift switch
POWER 100 watts, 50 watts, .5 watt and mute
TUBES N/A
SPEAKER 12" Catalyst HC100 4Ω, 100-watt
WEIGHT 34.5 lbs (tested)
BUILT Malaysia (USA designed)

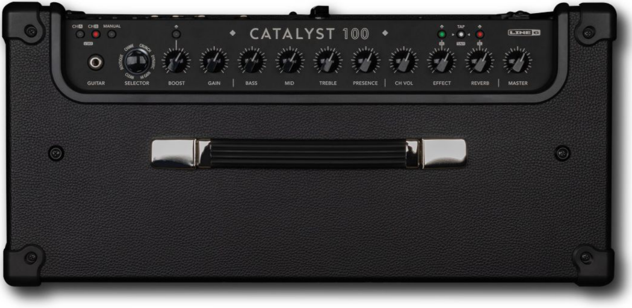
KUDOS Great range of realistic-feeling amp tones. Variable power. 18 effects plus a dedicated reverb (six types). Deep editing via Catalyst Edit app. MIDI and USB connectivity. Built-in four-channel recording interface
CONCERNS Foot switch not included. No speaker jack

AS MUCH AS tube amplifiers rule for tone, dynamic feel and raw punch, many players enjoy the benefits of modeling amps with their ability to deliver a multitude of sounds, not to mention their affordability and lighter weight. One of the newest contenders in the modeling arena is the Line 6 Catalyst series combos that include a 60-watt 1x12, a 200-watt 2x12 and the 100-watt 1x12 featured in this review.

On first glimpse, the Catalyst 100 looks no more complex than a typical tube combo, with its top-mounted knobs and an open-back cabinet covered in grained black vinyl. As you'd expect from a Line 6 product, it packs a ton of technology under the hood, and user-friendliness must have been high on the list of design goals. The amp selector knob offers six amps to choose from: Clean, Boutique, Chime, Crunch, Dynamic and Hi Gain, all of which are original amp designs created from the ground up, rather than models of existing amplifiers. That said, the tones they represent are in the wheelhouse of Fender, Matchless, Vox, Marshall, Mesa and other popular amplifiers in the low-, medium- and high-gain realms. A variable boost is available on all amp selections (each boost is different and matched to the specific amp), and there's a complement of gain, bass, mid, treble, presence and channel- and master-volume controls.

Three lighted buttons above the input jack select channel A (white) or channel B (red), and you can configure them any way you like and save those sounds by pressing and holding either button until the corresponding light blinks. A total of 12 user presets can be stored in six banks, which are accessed by holding down the manual button and using the amp selector knob to scroll though the banks. You can also toggle between the channels and activate any single effect — including boost or tap tempo — with the optional two-button LFS2 foot-switch ($39 street). However, if you want to keep things really simple, pressing the third button activates Manual mode (blue) where knob settings are completely WYSIWYG, just like the controls on a typical tube amp.

I auditioned the Catalyst using three guitars — a Reverend Gristlemaster T-style, a Gibson Historic '59 Les Paul and a Hamer Newport semi-hollow with Duncan Phat Cat P-90s — and they all sounded great through it, which has much to do with the dynamic feel of the Line 6 models and the amp's ability to preserve the guitars' distinct personalities. The Catalyst dished out tones that worked well for rhythm and lead, with plenty of stops along the way for clean, dirty rhythm and super-sustaining distortion sounds. It's loud enough for gigs with a full band (although a 40-watt Fender Hot Rod Deluxe used for comparison was markedly louder), and the onboard D.I. made it easy to run a feed to the P.A. and have better control of the overall level. And in cases where less



The control panel on the user-friendly Catalyst 100 looks no more complex than that found on a typical tube combo, but the tones and effects on offer belie the amp's traditional appearance.

CATALYST 100
LINE 6
CATALYST
HC100

volume was required, a switch on the back sets the power to 50 watts, .5 watts or mute, the last of which is handy for silent practice and recording. On that note, the Catalyst doubles as a four-channel interface (four in/four out), and the USB provides computer connectivity and tone editing via the free Catalyst Edit app for desktop and mobile devices (Mac, PC, iOS and Android).

The effects are from the Helix/HX library, and we start off with a dedicated reverb knob that lets you tweak levels on the fly, and a button above it that selects six reverb types: spring, plate, chamber, hall, modulated and shimmer. The 'verbs all sound smooth, airy and well detailed, and either the blackface-style spring or the more studio-sounding plate were always on during my tests.

You also get a choice of 18 other effects in the delay, modulation and pitch categories, all of which are accessed by pressing and holding the effects button and using the tap button to switch between effect categories. From there the selector knob lets you choose between six effects in each category. The effects all sound great, and I dug the selections from the delay category (which is the default when you turn on the power), especially tape echo and analog delay. I also really liked the chorus, tremolo and rotary from the modulation group, and the octave fuzz and pitch harmony settings from the plethora of pitch choices. (Tone geek alert: The effects and reverbs can be moved to pre- or post-amp voicing by holding the effect or reverb button and turning the effects knob. Lower than 12 o'clock is pre, and above 12 o'clock is post.)

Whether or not you're using the LFS2 foot switch, changing effects takes some knob/button manipulations that are tricky on the fly, and that's why it's advantageous to use an optional MIDI controller to have full access to the effects. I also liked using my own pedals with the Catalyst, running them straight into the front end, which works well with this amp. In addition there's the option of running time-based effects in the FX loop, and Line 6 added a switch to go directly into the power amp, bypassing the preamp and basically turning the Catalyst into a powered speaker for use with an external modeling device.

It all highlights the über flexibility of the Catalyst and how it can accommodate just about any configuration for performing or recording, while remaining a very straightforward affair if all you need is switchable clean and distorted sounds, reverb, and delay or other effect. The Catalyst 100 is certainly an amp for the times, a super deal for $399, and it ably earns an Editors' Pick Award.

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

POSITIVE GRID

RIFF Guitar Interface and App

TESTED BY CHRISTOPHER SCAPELLITI

POSITIVE GRID EARNED a ton of well-deserved attention in 2020 with Spark, its groundbreaking guitar practice amp and app. The compact, 40-watt combo not only delivers a range of great amp emulations and effects powered by Positive Grid's BIAS Tone engine but also helps players practice, jam and learn with a variety of applications and features. Now the company brings its trailblazing innovations to RIFF, a compact and portable USB audio interface for computers and mobile devices that's optimized for electric, acoustic and bass guitars. To that end, RIFF features high-resolution audio (24-bit/96kHz) and a Tone mode with three preamp and overdrive emulations that let you add warmth, analog boost or cranked-up midrange-enhanced overdrive.

SPECIFICATIONS

RIFF Guitar Interface and App
CONTACT positivegrid.com
PRICE $99 direct

INTERFACE Central control knob (rotate, push), display, and indicators for clip, direct and tone
I/O 1/4" mono instrument input, 1/8" stereo headphone output, 1/4" stereo line output, micro USB
EXTRAS BIAS FX 2 LE software, PreSonus Studio One Prime software, micro-USB to USB-A computer cable, micro-USB to Lightning iOS cable
DIMENSIONS 0.85" x 2.16" x 3.47"
COMPATIBILITY Windows 8 or later/macOS 10.11 or later/iOS 11 or later
BUILT China

KUDOS Pristine 24-bit/96kHz audio device optimized for guitar and bass, with three onboard preamp and overdrive emulations. Interfaces with BIAS FX 2 and includes cables for PC and iOS devices
CONCERNS Too basic to serve as your main audio interface

But what makes RIFF especially great for guitarists is how it integrates with Positive Grid's BIAS FX 2 amp and effects software, giving you thousands of tonal options, along with customizable functions from RIFF's large central control knob. Should you not own BIAS, you'll be glad to take advantage of the free BIAS FX 2 LE software included with RIFF. The device also comes with PreSonus Studio One Prime recording software and USB cables for interfacing with computers and iOS devices. There's a lot going on under the hood here, so let's jump in.

As audio interfaces go, RIFF is among the most compact I've seen. The sleek metal box was small enough to sit unobtrusively on my crowded studio desktop and be neatly stowed away in my laptop bag when I went traveling on weekends. My model had a sleek black exterior, but RIFF is also available in striking red, green and blue finishes. Connections include (on the lower end panel) a 1/4-inch mono instrument input and a 1/8-inch stereo headphone jack for monitoring your guitar and DAW signals; and (on the top end panel) a 1/4-inch stereo line output for mixers and monitors (same signal as the headphone jack) and the USB connection for computers and devices.

Hook RIFF up to your computer, and its bright, easy-to-read screen lights up above the large knurled control knob. Pressing down the control knob lets you select from four modes shown on the screen: Input (volume), Output (volume), Direct (for zero-latency tracking) and Tone. Once you've selected a mode, spin the control to dial in input, output and direct volume levels, and choose from the Tone mode's four preamp and overdrive settings: off, Modern (mild compression), Transparent (slight low and high boost) and Old School Fat (chunky midrange boost). Below the screen are three useful LED indicators: clip (red), which shows when your signal is too hot; direct (blue), to remind you that the Direct mode volume is set to something other than zero; and Tone (amber), to indicate that one of the three preamp settings is active.

Positive Grid
42
INPUT
OUTPUT
DIRECT
TONE
IN
OUT
CLIP
DIRECT
TONE
RIFF

On its own, RIFF is a terrific audio interface, thanks to its onboard Tone presets and impressive 24-bit/96kHz resolution, not to mention a 113dB dynamic range. Recording with it is a breeze. Connect it to your computer, fire up your DAW and select RIFF as the input and output device in your preferences. Set your input and output levels, use Direct mode for zero latency, and off you go. Once you've created a new track, launch the BIAS plug-in and start designing your tone from a wide variety of amp and effects emulations, or use the software's Guitar Match, which uncannily lets your guitar sound like pretty much any other model you can think of. In my case, my late '60s Gibson ES-335 was treated to a hyperrealistic emulation of an early '60s Fender Strat.

But it's when using BIAS FX 2 in standalone mode that RIFF really shows its stuff. When launched, the BIAS FX 2 application will lead you through the automatic gain setup, a handy feature that optimizes performance based on your guitar's pickups. While I sometimes had to tweak this manually to get it just right, the software did a good job of getting me in the zone. In addition to Guitar Match, BIAS FX 2 includes Authentic Tone, which delivers detailed amp and effects emulations and lets you build custom pedalboards, as well as ToneCloud, an impressive online library of some 50,000-plus guitar tones. For practice and learning, the Music Page feature lets you browse and search tracks to play along with, and learn songs via BIAS's Auto Chords function, which displays chords in real time and at the tempo of your choice.

Given all on offer here, RIFF's single control knob works surprisingly well for navigating BIAS FX 2, and it can be customized to your preferences. Simply hold it down for two seconds and assign any of the following functions: Preset Selection, Signal Chain Activation, Metronome, Preset Scene and Preset BPM Control.

RIFF is small, smart and sleek in its tough metal case.

As a recording tool, RIFF is a no-nonsense, easy-to-use interface that should be a welcome addition to any guitarist's DAW setup. You say you already have an audio interface? Of course you do, but RIFF is optimized for electric, acoustic and bass guitars, and provides fast and intuitive access to great guitar tones. For that alone, I think it's a must-have.

Add in seamless integration with BIAS FX 2 (as well as the free LE version), and RIFF becomes a powerful tool for practicing, songwriting, learning and recording. Beyond the tonal control on offer, the RIFF/BIAS combo will streamline your workflow, just as it did for me. For flawless audio, powerful tone and sheer ingenuity, RIFF receives our Editors' Pick Award.

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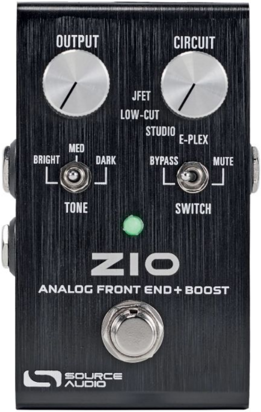
SOURCE AUDIO

Zio analog front-end + boost

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS



SOURCE AUDIO IS best known for its forward-thinking digital effects pedals, like the C4 synthesizer and Ultrawave distortion, as well as the Nemesis delay and Ventris reverb. But a few years ago, the company began working with Christopher Venter of Shoe Pedals to combine the "under the hood" tweakability of its Neuro editing system with more traditional sounds. The first fruit of this combined labor was the True Spring Reverb, an accurate digital representation of analog spring reverb and tremolo. More recently, digital-circuitry supply chain issues led the team to speed up the release of its first analog collaboration, the ZIO booster pedal.

ZIO is the first, and so far only, pedal in the line to eschew the Neuro editing system, sticking with the standard surface knobs and switches. This classic clean boost pedal adds no distortion or radical coloration, and as such its merits rely on the quality of the op-amp used to increase the output. After bench-testing various options, Venter and Source Audio chose the Burr-Brown SoundPlus op-amp for its dynamic range, frequency response and feel. The pedal supplies up to 20dB of boost, taking your guitar's high-impedance signal and outputting a strong, low-impedance signal to reduce any color created by buffered pedals and cables further down the signal chain. ZIO also has a toggle to restore some cable coloration, if you prefer.

ZIO has four distinct preamp circuits. JFET offers a transparent signal boost; Low-Cut reduces bottom-end for a tighter sound with added headroom; Studio is inspired by the Pultec trick used in recording, which adds clarity by cutting muddy frequencies and adding upper midrange articulation; and E-Plex mimics the warm grit of vintage Echoplex tape delay preamps.

A boost can serve different purposes depending on where it appears in your signal chain. I used ZIO at the beginning to restore tone lost by running through the pedals and laptop situated between my guitar and amps. That was when playing clean. With a mild overdrive switched on for crunch rhythm, engaging the booster created a beefier sound with more sustain, suitable for solos. Toggling the tone switch to the Dark setting made the bridge pickup of my Stratocaster sing with the smooth character of a Les Paul.

I gravitated toward the Low-Cut mode, which let me play through notoriously woofy, distorted Fender amps with a new clarity, even on the neck pickup, although the warm tone of the E-Plex setting came in handy when attempting to play clean traditional jazz on my Strat. Also cool is a switching option that mutes output one while sending the signal to a tuner in output two.

You could also employ ZIO after drive pedals as a tone modifier and a volume boost that won't change the amount of distortion, or you could place it at the end of the pedalboard and/or long cable run to return your sound to the pristine tone of running direct to your amplifier.

ZIO provides enough sonic variation and value to justify a slot on a pedalboard already crowded with overdrives, distortions and fuzzes. That it does so with the same technological ingenuity that Source Audio has always brought to its digital products makes it a worthy Editors' Pick recipient.

MAIN OUTPUT
TUNER / LINE OUT

SPECIFICATIONS

ZIO
CONTACT www.sourceaudio.net
PRICE $199

CONTROLS Output, circuit selector knob, Medium, Bright, and Dark tone selector toggle for adding cable coloration. Mute/true-bypass toggle switch for silent tuning
EXTRAS Foot switch can be set to bypass or mute for tuning
SIZE 4.1 x 2.36 x 2.22 inches
BUILT China

KUDOS Versatile, powerful, clean boost that you can color or not, to taste
CONCERNS None

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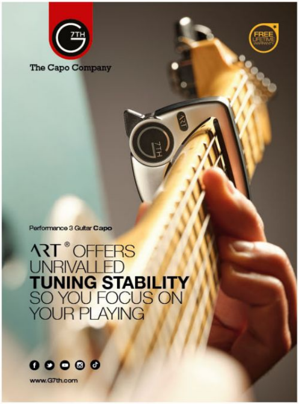

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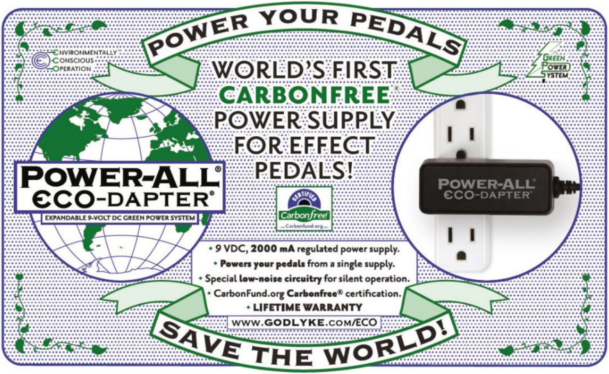

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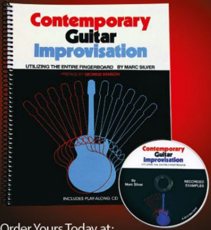
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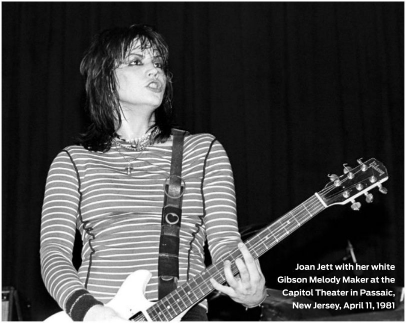

Joan Jett with her white Gibson Melody Maker at the Capitol Theater in Passaic, New Jersey, April 11, 1981

How I Wrote…

“Bad Reputation”

Joan Jett and Kenny Laguna get personal about her early ’80s underground hit.

BY JOE BOSSO

JOAN JETT IS unequivocal about “Bad Reputation,” the rebellious pop-punk anthem that kicked off her post-Runaways career in 1980. “I love the song and am very proud of it,” she says. “It’s the basis for everything I do because it tells the truth. Too many people held this negative view of me because I played electric guitar. They said I was mean because of how I looked. I had this supposed ‘bad reputation’ because I was doing exactly what I wanted to do. It’s what my parents told me I could do, and I believed them. I addressed it all in the song.”

OWNING HER STORY

Following the breakup of the Runaways in 1979, Jett, along with her manager, Kenny Laguna, and producer Ritchie Cordell, set about recording her debut solo album on the cheap (and by calling in numerous favors) at the Who’s Ramport Studios in London. Friends like the Sex Pistols’ Steve Jones and Paul Cook assisted, along with members of the Roll-Ups: guitarist Lea Hart, bassist Jeff Peters and drummer Paul Simmons.

After recording on and off for a year, Cordell opined that the record was one song short. As it turned out, Jett had an ace up her sleeve. “There was this one riff that I had sitting around,” she says. “It was a fast, straight-up Ramones kind of thing, and I thought it was pretty good. I had just come off from playing with the Ramones, so that kind of style was in my head — fast and hard.”

At the same time, Jett talked to Laguna about her career and what she saw as misconceptions about her in the press. “The writers were always trying to make me out to be bad, or wrong — you know, not feminine,” she recalls. “To them, I was ‘the other,’ whatever that is. I decided to embrace it, and Kenny and I set about codifying it in words.”

A ONE-DAY WONDER

The song they worked up was tough enough to feel authentically punk, but filled with ear-candy pop smarts. “That’s the combo you get with me and Kenny,” Jett says. “With me alone, you wouldn’t get that.” Laguna says a key moment occurred when his friend Marty Joe Kupersmith (of Jay and the Americans fame) heard the line “I don’t give a damn about my reputation.” “He said, ‘That’s it! That’s a song!” Laguna says. With that encouragement, he and Jett finished the lyrics. (Kupersmith shares writing credit on the song with Jett, Laguna and Cordell.)

Finances were shot, and Jett had one day of studio time left. “We recorded the song lean and mean,” she says. “It was pretty close to one take. I played all the guitar parts on my white Melody Maker. I think I went through an Ampeg amp, but it could have been a Music Man or a Vox. The sound was great. It was absolutely what we wanted.”

SOUNDTRACK SENSATION

Jett felt as if “Bad Reputation” had all the makings of a hit. “It was catchy and something people could relate to,” she says. “I loved it right off the bat.” The song was the lead track on her eponymous debut album, released independently in 1980, but it failed to chart. It wasn’t until a year later, when she formed the Blackhearts and was about to issue her breakthrough album, *I Love Rock ’n Roll*, that the song picked up steam. Her debut album was re-released by Boardwalk Records as *Bad Reputation*, and the song became a favorite with DJs across the country.

“Even so, it was never released as a single,” Laguna says. “It became this underground hit. When iTunes came along, however, the song became a Gold download. It went wild.” Over the years, “Bad Reputation” has been a staple in Jett’s live shows, and it’s become a go-to pick for film and TV music supervisors who have featured it in shows such as *Freaks and Geeks* and *American Chopper*, as well as the movies *10 Things I Hate About You* and *Shrek*, among others. (It was even used this year in a self-deprecating ad for Folgers Coffee.)

Jett was particularly pleased in 2019 when Nike unveiled a spot featuring 10-year-old soccer phenom Makena Cook playing with her heroes in advance of the Women’s World Cup, all to the soundtrack of “Bad Reputation.” “That was a really great one,” she says. “I think a lot of women and girls hear the song and say, ‘Yeah… it’s telling my story.’” “Bad Reputation” is featured on *Changeup,* the new all-acoustic album by Joan Jett & the Blackhearts. ◼

> **“I THINK A LOT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS HEAR THE SONG AND SAY, ‘YEAH… IT’S TELLING MY STORY’”**

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